Communion with God : relations between the divine and the human in the theology of John Owen.

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Abstract:

Communion with God: Relations between the Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen

This work outlines John Owen's conception of human communion with God. We argue that his anthropology is best understood by placing it within a framework of relations between God and humanity. What we discover is a Puritan approach that seeks to emphasize a holistic understanding of human existence and a Trinitarian sensibility grounded in an incarnational theology, held together by an experiential concern for the believer. Throughout our study we will see that Owen is best understood as presenting an anthroposensitive theology: he aims to avoid divorcing theological considerations from practical human application, since theological reflections are always interwoven with anthropological concerns. This is achieved primarily through his acknowledgement that fallen humanity's lack of communion with God can only be answered with a consistent Christological and Trinitarian emphasis.

Before beginning the analysis outlined above, chapter one of our study provides a needed overview of the growing collection of academic literature on John Owen since such a survey does not yet exist. Chapter two moves into an examination of the primary sources, beginning with a description of Owen's formulation of the *imago Dei*. Given the realities of the fall and the shattered image, in chapter three we examine Owen's conception of the incarnation, paying special attention to the humanity of Christ. From there we proceed in chapter four to Owen's exposition of the doctrine of justification wherein he seeks to hold together God's redemptive action and human response. Chapter five provides an extended analysis of Owen's conception of the Christian experience of communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We conclude in chapter six by exploring two signs of continuing communion experienced prior to glorification: Lord's day and Lord's Supper. Throughout our study we will expose the reader to the work of this Puritan theologian as he expresses himself in various genres (e.g., sermons, commentary) and occasional writings, providing a broad sampling of Owen's thought.

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Acknowledgements

Life is full of journeys, and those treks are enjoyable primarily because of the people with whom one walks. Although I remain responsible for all that follows – since it can only represent my limited perspective of the many things seen during my excursions – it must be said that if others had not helped me notice details in the landscape and pointed out distant vistas, my own record of the journey would be much less interesting. With this in mind, I would like briefly to thank those who have been so influential along the way.

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Two mentors warrant special mention in respect to this project. Susan Hardman Moore and Colin E. Gunton proved to be the ideal combination of supervisors, and if this work succeeds in its attempt to be of interest to both historians and theologians they deserve much of the credit. Dr. Hardman Moore helped me with the complexity of the seventeenth century English theological scene, while Professor Gunton consistently enabled me to see how Owen's theology addresses many ancient theological questions that remain relevant to this day. Yet more than their academic expertise, both have demonstrated incredible grace and friendship, making this time of research thoroughly rewarding and enjoyable.

Much of the material that follows was presented in different public settings, and I would like to recognize some of the groups involved for their helpful feedback: University of Birmingham conference on the "History of Christianity," Society for the Study of Theology, and the Evangelical Theological Society. A day conference on "Calvin and Calvinism" at King's College was especially profitable thanks to Paul Helm's insightful response to my paper. But most of all I would like to express my debt to the Research Institute of Systematic Theology, where members heard and commented on much of what follows. The debate and consistent dialogue allowed through the Institute has greatly contributed to my research, and more importantly, the friendships established have preserved my mental health – it can be difficult for a

Californian to rise above London's winter days, but your company and laughter did provide relief.

Other individuals who have read either sections or the whole of this work, offering helpful feedback, include: Ashley Null – thank you for the countless hours of conversation as you helped me untangle the historical complexities related to the topic of justification as well as your Latin expertise; Steve Holmes – thank you for your careful proofreading, wise suggestions, and enduring friendship; Dave Horner – thank you for acting as a trusted authority on Aristotle and Aquinas, offering helpful recommendations; Ron Frost – thank you for your consistent enthusiasm for my project, especially since your perspective of Post-Reformation Reformed theology is slightly different from my own; Daniel Hill – thank you for your insightful feedback and for occasionally lending me your Latin skills; members of the LGT Theological Reading Group, especially Brian Brock, Randy Rauser, Babu Venkataraman, and Eric Flett, thank you for your camaraderie, not to mention your willingness to read and critique several chapters, making sure the arguments were sound.

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Yet research requires more than the academy, and particular thanks goes out to a special group of family and friends, without whom this work could never have been accomplished. You have sustained Tabitha and me with prayers, words of encouragement, and strong support. St. Paul's Presbyterian Church of Orlando, FL and Grove Chapel of London have been our loving communities of faith, and have shown us unending kindness. The London Goodenough Trust provided us the most wonderful and stimulating living environment imaginable. Our parents and siblings have consistently loved and encouraged us. Thank you Gary and Linda Kapic, John and Lynne Malley, David and Jennifer Kapic, Ming and Jennifer Chiou, and Danny

Kapic. A special thank you to Jim and Dayle Seneff for your tremendous support and guidance on so many different levels – your friendship is dear to us. Thank you all for sharing our vision that theological education can and should serve the church.

It is said that if you want to emphasize a point, you must either begin or end with it. Although it is common for authors to thank their spouses, and I am sure they mean it, I fear that this general practice may somehow take away from the abiding gratefulness I wish to express to Tabitha, my wife and most vigorous editor. Words cannot describe the joy I feel for being allowed to join you on this great journey over the last eight years of our marriage. Your sacrifices have been significant, your encouragement profound, your friendship steadfast, and your love unwavering. The best part about these years of research has been those opportunities we have had, especially over long meals and coffee breaks, to dream and hope together. Your smile continues to amaze me as it lights up a room, and, as I have discovered, blazes in the midst of a gray city. John Owen once quoted Augustine as saying, "The delight in love is that of the lover in his beloved. Love is the beat of the heart that delights itself in something." Through being with you I believe that I have experienced hints of what Owen describes as the soul resting and delighting in another. This work is dedicated to you as a small token of my love and appreciation.

May this work be to the glory of the
triune God and to the building up of His church.

Kelly M. Kapic
London
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Abbreviations

ANF	*Ante-Nicene Fathers*
BE	Owen, *Works*, Banner of Truth reprint edition
BQ	*The Baptist Quarterly*
BS	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BT	Owen, *Biblical Theology*, Westcott translation
CD	Barth, *Church Dogmatics*
CH	*Church History*
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
DA	Aristotle, *De Anima*
DLGTT	Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*
DNB	*Dictionary of National Biography*
EN	Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*
EQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
FR	*Fides Reformata*
GC	Owen, *"Greater Catechism"*
HJ	*Historical Journal*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
IJST	*International Journal of Systematic Theology*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JEH	*Journal of Ecclesiastical History*
JHBS	*Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*
JPP	*Journal of Pastoral Practice*
KJV	*King James or Authorized Version*
KTR	*King's Theological Review*
LC	Owen, *"Lesser Catechism"*
NPNF1	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*
NPNF2	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*
PRRD1	Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics , vol. 1*
RC	*The Racovian Catechism*
RD	Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*
RR	Johnson and Leith, eds., *Reformed Reader, vol. 1*
SBET	*The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*
SC	Owen, *A Short Catechism* or *A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
ST	Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*
TB	*Tyndale Bulletin*
TR	*Theologia Reformata*
TT	*Theology Today*
WCF	*Westminster Confession of Faith*
WLC	*Westminster Larger Catechism*
Works	Owen, *Works*, Goold Edition
WSC	*Westminster Shorter Catechism*
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*

"To the Puritans, communion between God and man is the end to which both creation and redemption are the means; it is the goal to which both theology and preaching must ever point; it is the essence of true religion; it is, indeed, the definition of Christianity."

J. I. PACKER[1]

[1] J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 202.

Chapter 1

The Influential Theology of John Owen?
A Survey of the Scholarship

"Dr. John Owen was a man of no ordinary intellect."
SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE [1]

"Some writer in the last century (Dr. James Hamilton, if I mistake not) declared that evangelical theology had been hitherto alluvial for the most part, and that its main element was a detritus from mount Owen."
JAMES MOFFATT (1904)[2]

Introduction

What criteria might be used to judge the success or influence of a past theologian? Answering such a loaded question would first require a careful definition of what one means by successful and influential. Though engaging in such a discussion would be valid, an unconventional approach may prove more interesting in the case of John Owen (1616-1683). Although Owen wrote in the middle of the seventeenth century he remains far from forgotten. Someone walking along the streets of London today can see several bookshops bearing his name.[3] Visiting the outskirts of London, one might also stumble across a small non-conformist Seminary that has recently opened the John Owen Theological Centre.[4] Moving from the streets of the city to the superhighway in cyberspace one discovers further signs of Owen's continued influence. Web sites either dedicated solely to him, or including him as an authority, are numerous.[5] Ages Software has even produced an entire CD-

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[1] Coleridge, *Notes on English Divines*, ed. Derwent Coleridge (London: Edward Moxon, 1853), vol. 2, 106.

[2] Moffatt, *The Golden Book of John Owen* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), xvi.

[3] I.e., Wesley Owen Books & Music stores, which refer to John Wesley and John Owen.

[4] The London Theological Seminary has recently opened this Institute as the foundation for its endeavor to become internationally accredited through its relationship with Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, USA.

[5] While many either refer to him or use extensive quotations from his work, two particular examples demonstrate his popularity in this media. The first is strictly dedicated to "John Owen – Puritan Prince of the Divines: A Web Site Devoted to the Greatest Puritan Theologian,"

ROM which compiles most of Owen's writings in a searchable format.[6] In the realm of printed material, a twenty-four volume edition of his *Works* remains in print,[7] and a recent translation of his major Latin treatise *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ ΠΑΝΤΟΔΑΠΗΙΑ* has also recently appeared.[8] Additionally, a revival has taken place in publishing abridged and 'easy-to-read' versions of several of his key books.[9] Kris Lundgaard, although not exactly engaged in abridgement, openly confesses to having "kidnapped Owen" – using him as a sort of "co-author."[10] Lungaard's book, which is in essence Owen's thoughts on the believer's struggle with sin rewritten for today, was at one point selling one thousand copies a month! In all of these formats, this Puritan preacher shows his continued presence among clergy and laity.

In recent years renewed scholarly interest has also arisen in studies of Owen, usually concerned with his theology. For the most part this revival has remained in the form of unpublished dissertations and scattered articles, with a few serious treatments receiving book-length publication. Given the current situation, our study will begin by scanning the history of scholarship surrounding this English divine.

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theocentric.com/johnowen/main2.html. This site includes some of Owen's works scanned for internet reading, a gallery of quotations, an old biography, etc. The second example shows how people continue to regard him as an authority able to persuade today's reader: "John Owen on the Jewish People," chaim.org/owen.htm. At this site one finds an appeal to Owen in order to convince contemporary Churches to minister to Jewish people.

[6] "The Works of John Owen," (Rio, WI: Ages Software, 2000). Although claiming to be the 19th century edition, this is clearly a scanned copy of the Banner of Truth reprint mentioned below. Unfortunately the CD is missing the Latin works, uses the Banner volume numbers, and has altogether new page numbers.

[7] John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 24 vols. (Edinburgh and London: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850-1855). At this point it is necessary to note that volumes 1-16 were reprinted in Edinburgh by Banner of Truth Trust, 1965. However, the Banner Edition (*BE*) omitted all of Owen's Latin writings and orations, thus rearranging and combining volume sixteen and volume seventeen. The last seven volumes of the Goold set, which contain Owen's Hebrews commentary, were also reprinted (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991). The *BE* of Hebrews does not follow the volume numbers of the Goold edition, always one volume behind. E.g., *BE*, v. 20 is Goold, v. 21. Hereafter, *Works* will refer to the original Goold twenty-four-volume edition. Volume number, and then page reference, will always annotate references to Owen's *Works*. Note that the frequent italics found in Owen's *Works* are not retained, since many times it is unclear, from the different seventeenth century editions, whether the emphasis comes directly from Owen or from an excited publisher.

[8] John Owen, *Biblical Theology, or The Nature, Origin, Development, and Study of Theological Truth, in Six Books*, trans. Stephen P. Westcott (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994). The original title of the translated work is *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ ΠΑΝΤΟΔΑΠΗΙΑ: sive de Natura, Ortu, Progressu, et Studio, Verœ Theologiæ, etc.* and may be found in vol. 17 of the original Goold edition; it has been left out in the more recent *BE* publication.

[9] E.g., "The Treasures of John Owen for Today's Readers," a multi-volume series printed by Banner of Truth Trust and edited by R. J. K. Law. See also James M. Houston's version of three of Owen's treatises in, *Sin and Temptations: The Challenge of Personal Godliness* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996). Grace Publications also print several abridgements of classic Owen treatises.

[10] Lungaard, *The Enemy Within: Straight Talk About the Power and Defeat of Sin* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1998), 14.

While quickly introducing the relevant secondary literature, this study will also inform the experienced student of many neglected monographs.[11] Due to Owen's eminence as a Puritan theologian, there have been both scholarly and 'popular' treatments of his life and theology. Discussion of popular literature will be limited to occasional references to illustrate the various treatments Owen has received since his death, while primary focus will be given to academic treatments.

Within the body of literature, two particular types have developed: first, pertaining to Owen's theology; second, regarding his life. As these works are referenced, the reader must remember that this chapter is designed as a survey, not an exhaustive analysis. Throughout this survey we highlight the main areas of debate and discussion; however, since our study is concerned primarily with Owen's anthropology as viewed through the lens of communion with God, we will draw special attention to where these assessments raise relevant questions, concerns, misunderstandings, and insights concerning our investigation. What we discover is the need for a full exploration of Owen's anthropology as understood within a framework of relationship with God.

Our study of the primary sources in chapters two through six investigates Owen's conception of human relations with God, seeking to provide a fresh analysis of his theological anthropology. This is achieved through exploring several key themes: humanity as created in the image of God, the need for the incarnation, questions relating to the idea of justification, a believer's communion with the Triune God, and the Lord's day and Lord's Supper. The theologian we encounter in our study is somewhat different from the one commonly associated with the name John Owen: he is not a rationalist, nor a theologian simply interested in abstract speculations; nor is he easily labeled anthropocentric – since by that term humanity is usually given a position that Owen consistently believes is reserved only for God. Instead, throughout our study we will observe Owen as an *anthroposensitive*

[11] In the recent dissertation by U. S. G. Rehnman, a generally exceptional study that will be dealt with below, our suspicion about the need for a full-length review of literature on Owen studies can be demonstrated. Rehnman is a bit too dismissive when he states near the beginning of his investigation – after only really dealing with the biographies of Owen – that "there are a number of smaller studies on Owen which contribute little to our understanding of him," 4. His footnote lists eleven studies, mostly short articles, making no distinction between such minor works as the article by Mayor and more substantial contributions like the insightful work of Gleason. Our survey of literature concerning Owen hopefully will bring to light past studies either neglected or up to this point unknown.

theologian. Since the following chapters deal with this idea more fully, at this point we will simply define 'anthroposenistive' as *a refusal to divorce theological considerations from practical human application, since theological reflections are always interwoven with anthropological concerns.* The combination of the Greek *anthropos* and the English *sensitive* is an attempt to avoid a simplistic classification of Owen as either theocentric *or* anthropocentric. If one had to choose between these options, Owen would be theocentric, but such a conclusion can be used to diminish the anthropological emphasis seen throughout Owen's corpus. Other common terms, such as "pastoral" or "experiential," often carry with them unnecessarily negative connotations or they represent a notion of what is done *after* theological reflection, rather than informing that reflection. In other words, according to Owen's methodology, theological reflections must entail anthropological implications, otherwise there is something wrong with the theology that results.[12] It is for this reason that we will see Owen consistently move between divine action and human response. Since humanity was created to commune with God, the theological enterprise must be primarily concerned with understanding humanity in light of relations with God. At the end of this present chapter, and after our survey of the growing scholarship on John Owen, we will return to these particular themes which will form the outline for the rest of our study.

From The Seventeenth through the Nineteenth Century

In order to cover quickly the time from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century we shall simply offer snapshots of treatments regarding Owen, rather than book reviews. More detailed analysis will begin in our discussion of twentieth century literature, as this will demonstrate the growing revival in Owen scholarship which accepts him as a somewhat overlooked figure available for further historical and theological inquiry.

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[12] Cf. Owen's comments on the methodology of the author of Hebrews: "In the midst of his [the author's] reasonings and testimonies for the explanation or confirmation of what he delivers dogmatically, he lays hold on some occasion or other to press his exhortations unto faith, obedience, with constancy and perseverance in the profession of the gospel. . . . so insensibly passing from one thing unto another, that he might at the same time inform the minds and work upon the affections of

Little captures Owen's popularity during the seventeenth century better than a vicious letter sent to him by a Quaker sympathizer.[13] Apparently 'Thomas Truthsbye', in an effort to learn about which "Clergy-men were famous, and notorious" in the eyes of the leaders of the "late revolutions in England," kept hearing Owen's name above the others.[14] Offering what appears to us to be a wonderful compliment of a theologian's accessibility – though never intended that way – he adds: "I can scarce visit a Tavern, or Country Ale-house, but forth comes some of the Learned Works of *John Owen*, a Servant, &c. as if you were cut out to entertain all sorts of Guests; if I send Tobacco, your Books are the inclosure of it, and there I finde your name stinking worse than that *Indian* Weed." Though attacking Owen, Truthsbye actually attests to how influential Owen and his writings had become by the second half of the seventeenth century.

Owen's fame continues into the eighteenth century, though usually friend rather than foe remember him. From the testimony echoed in his funeral sermon to the two early biographies of Owen, he was clearly considered a (if not *the*) leading British theologian of the seventeenth century.[15] As such, he was often idealized to represent the very best of Puritan theology and practice, thus usually downplaying his political involvement. Furthermore, Owen's own writings continued to have a wide readership as represented by the fact that there were over fifty printings in the eighteenth century of different works by Owen.[16] This helps explain why William

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them with whom he dealt," *Works*, 20: 320. We believe Owen, consciously or unconsciously, tries to follow this very pattern himself.

[13] Original letter is found in the British Library, but Peter Toon, whose work is discussed below, has conveniently reprinted it in *The Correspondence of John Owen* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1970), 166-67, original emphasis. Toon suggests that 'Thomas Truthsbye' is probably Thomas Taylor, cf. *DNB*.

[14] Truthsbye writes: "Your [i.e., Owen] Worship was cried up as high as Tyburn, as well known, and as little trusted; in my Travels Westward they calld [sic.] you *Quaker*, Northward *Anabaptist*, in *Oxford* a State *Independent*, in *London*, a *Jesuite*, beyond Seas a conscience-mender."

[15] David Clarkson, Owen's successor at the Leadenhall Street church in London, preached Owen's funeral sermon. It is reprinted in Thomas Russell's 1826 edition of *The Works of John Owen*, 1: 411 ff. In 1720 an anonymous *Life of John Owen* was printed, followed by John Asty, "Memoirs of the Life of John Owen," in *A Complete Collection of the Sermons of John Owen* (1721).

[16] See *The British Museum General Catalogue of Printed Books* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1959) and *The National Union Catalogue, Pre-1956 Imprints* (Chicago: Mansell, 1972). This and the statistic about the printings in nineteenth century were first brought to my attention by L. G. Williams (whose dissertation is discussed below), 303.

Wilberforce (1759-1833), best known for his leading role in abolishing the slave trade in Britain, so highly recommends Owen to his readers in 1797.[17]

Nevertheless, it was the nineteenth century which witnessed a real explosion of interest. On average there was a book by Owen published every year between 1800 and 1860.[18] During this time the first effort to publish Owen's complete works was embarked upon by Thomas Russell in 1826, although this early effort left much to be desired.[19] Given the renewed zeal for Owen's writings and the inadequacies of the Russell edition, William H. Goold launched the arduous effort of producing the definitive edition of Owen's works, a project that took place from 1850-55. Goold's final collection contained twenty-four volumes, including Owen's Latin speeches and writings. This edition grew out of and continued to encourage interest in Owen both for pastoral and academic purposes.

One need only look to the popular nineteenth century Baptist minister C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892) to see how Owen's appeal in England remained strong. Spurgeon, influencing a whole generation of preachers through The Pastors' College, Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, clearly encourages his students to wrestle through Owen's writings. Commenting on Owen's exposition of Psalm 130, Spurgeon praises him:

> It is unnecessary to say that he is the prince of divines. To master his works is to be a profound theologian. Owen is said to be a prolix, but it would be truer to say that he is condensed. His style is heavy because he gives notes of what he might have said, and passes on without fully developing the great thoughts of his capacious mind. He requires hard study, and none of us ought to grudge it.[20]

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[17] Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*, 18 ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1830), 240-41.

[18] L. G. Williams, 302-03. Note that abridgements of Owen's writings testify to his popularity and wide readership during this time. E.g., W. Wilson, "Selections from the Works of John Owen," (London, 1826).

[19] *The Works of John Owen*, ed. Thomas Russell, 21 vols. (London, 1826), containing another biography by William Orme (1787-1830). This edition was criticized for numerous reasons. For example, Russell declined to correct the significant inaccuracies of earlier editions: these include mispointing of the Hebrew, incorrect Greek accents, significant problems with quotations from the early Greek and Latin Fathers. Russell's edition also omits such important works as *Exercitations concerning ... a Day of Sacred Rest* and *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ ΠΑΝΤΟΔΑΠΗΙΑ*. Although in our study *Works* always refers to the later Goold edition, the reader must beware that even now some scholars persist in using the Russell edition, which has different volume and page numbers. E.g., Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (2nd ed., Cambridge: CUP, 1998).

[20] Spurgeon, *Commenting & Commentaries* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1876), 103. Cf. W. H. Goold, "John Owen," in *Evangelical Succession*, 3rd series printed lecture (Edinburgh: MacNiven & Wallace, 1883).

While we may argue that Spurgeon is overly kind regarding Owen's prose, his enthusiasm toward this Puritan remains representative of many at this time.

Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) reminds us that Owen influenced not only the English speaking world, but he also had an international following. Kuyper was a renowned Dutch theologian and later Prime Minister of the Netherlands (1900-1905). In the original Dutch edition to Kuyper's classic work *Het Werk Van Den Heiligen Geest*,[21] he begins his tome by noting his debt to Owen, who even two centuries later was considered by him the leading authority on the subject of the Holy Spirit. After discussing Owen's important contribution, he lists for his readers those works of Owen that were available in a Dutch translation – adding up to 74 volumes! Simply noting Kuyper's respect for Owen and the phenomenal number of Dutch translations demonstrates how Owen's books found an eager audience beyond Britain and the United States. This international interest has not died as recent studies of Owen published in Portuguese and Dutch clearly demonstrates.[22]

Scholarship in the Twentieth Century

Moving into the twentieth century we continue to see hints that the 'Atlas of Independency'[23] remained a favorite among English conservative congregational ministers, providing an intellectual foundation for many of their distinct theological emphases in a changing world. Likewise, though centuries old, Owen's writings continued to elicit the occasional response from those who viewed his theology as unbiblical and dangerous. For example, at the turn of the century an anonymous author felt obliged to answer Owen's classic statement on particular atonement, in *Under Calvin's Yoke: Dr. John Owen's Three Invincible Questions Answered by*

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[21] (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1888). The material on Owen is in the 'Voorrede' (i.e., Prologue), which includes his listing of Owen's translated works. Note that this listing of works is missing in the English translation of Kuyper's book. Cf. Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri de Vries (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1900).

[22] E.g., Valdeci Dos Santos, "O 'Crente Carnal' a Luz do ensino de John Owen sobre a Mortificacao," *FR* 4:1 (Ja-Je 1999): 57-68; R. W. DeKoeyer, "Pneumatologia: Enkel aspecten van de leer van de heilige Geest bji de puritein John Owen," *TR* 34 (1991), 226-46. A recent thesis from the Philippines also testifies to Owen's remaining international appeal: D. J. McKinley, "John Owen's View of Illumination and Its Contemporary Relevance" (Th.D., University of Santo Tomas, 1995).

[23] This name given to Owen originated as a slur when used by George Vernon, *A Letter to a Friend* (London, 1670), 36. He was discussing Owen's alleged role in bringing down Richard Cromwell. For a fuller discussion, see R. Tudor Jones, *Congregationalism in England 1662-1962* (London: Independent Press LTD, 1962), 71-2.

Bereana.[24] Here the author attempts to answer Owen's infamous syllogism, which countless Calvinists thought inevitably leads all reasonable Christians to conclude that Christ died only for the elect. While the argument in this brief book is of no direct concern to our study, what is of interest is the simple fact of its publication over two hundred years after Owen's death. It reveals that Owen's arguments were still used by Calvinists, and that Arminian theologians still found it necessary to interact with the long deceased spokesman of Puritan congregationalism. Clearly this anonymous author felt compelled to free those who, even after several centuries, remained not only under Calvin's influential yoke, but also Owen's!

Shortly after this publication, James Moffatt – who later became better known for his New Testament scholarship – published two works. First was an anthology entitled *The Golden Book of John Owen* in 1904, followed by *Life of Dr. Owen* in 1911.[25] The latter was a slightly edited and illustrated form of the "Introductory Sketch" found in the former. Moffatt's work contributes little to our understanding of Owen's theology, but contains a few relevant and provocative footnotes which draw the reader's attention to similarities between Owen's theology and Jonathan Edwards's classic, *Religious Affections*. Both authors have similar 'affective' theologies that include distinct places for contemplation of God in the Christian life. However, Moffatt leaves this completely undeveloped.[26] At points in our study we will draw further attention to Owen's affective theology, although we will not in this setting be able to engage in a comparison with Edwards.[27] Owen's emphasis on the affections demonstrates that he is not the dry rationalist painted by the broad brushstrokes often used to describe seventeenth century English Calvinists.

After Moffatt there is a gap before scholars revisit John Owen as a serious topic. Not until the 1940's and 1950's does Owen once again pique researchers' interest. Here begins a line of dissertations that wrestle with different aspects of Owen's theology and life. The first was R. G. Lloyd's "The Life and Work of John Owen with Special Reference to the Socinian Controversies of the Seventeenth

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[24] (London: Elliot Stock, 1900).

[25] *Golden Book of John Owen*, ed. James Moffat (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904); Moffat, *The Life of Dr. Owen* (London, 1911).

[26] E.g., *Golden Book*, 195, 243.

[27] Note that Owen's work on the Holy Spirit is one of the relatively few sources that Edwards does cite in his *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: YUP, 1959, orig. 1746).

Century."[28] While this study has been superseded by more recent research, it nevertheless began the modern quest for better understanding Owen's theology within its historical context.[29]

For our purposes Lloyd's study raises several points worthy of mention. While he argues that Owen held to a "static view of revelation,"[30] Lloyd believes that "in practice," as worked out specifically against Owen's Socinian opponents, the Puritan divine valued three authorities: Scripture, the Church, and the Christian's experience of "transforming grace. He insisted that the Bible as a whole was divinely revealed, that it should be interpreted by means of approved theological principles, and that it was verifiable in experience."[31] While he problematically asserts that Owen's view of revelation is properly considered static, Lloyd correctly points in the right direction for understanding Owen's methodology which attempts to bring together the bible, the insights of saints throughout the ages, and present Christian experience. This last element has been underestimated by many who have tried to understand Owen's formulation and application of theology. Concerning the humanity of Christ, Lloyd questions Owen's conception of the two natures in the one person. "There is no reason to believe that Owen was right in supposing that a duality of this nature characterized His consciousness – that sometimes He acted as a man, sometimes as God." Lloyd goes on to reason that Owen's view is "hopeless" because "the personality of Jesus as a living whole is lost when He is considered as the result of bringing together two abstractions of this kind" (i.e., the divine and human nature).[32] However, did Owen truly present a divided person composed of two abstract concepts, or did he rather develop a more dynamic and complicated conception of Jesus that attempts to appreciate the *full* humanity and *full* divinity of the Messiah? As we will see later, Lloyd's concerns are answered in Owen's emphasis on the humanity of Christ, especially in regard to the work of the Holy

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[28] Lloyd, (Ph.D. diss., Edinburgh University, 1942).

[29] Lloyd's work was written prior to the following significant studies of Socinianism: Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism: Socinianism and its Antecedents* (Cambridge, Mass.: HUP, 1947); *A History of Unitarianism: In Transylvania, England, and America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952); John H. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: OUP, 1951); Stanislas Kot, *Socinianism in Poland*, trans. E. M. Wilbur (Boston: Star King Press, 1957).

[30] This accusation is found throughout Lloyd's dissertation. E.g., 43, 331, passim.

[31] Lloyd, 50.

[32] Lloyd, 220-21. Here we find the classic problem faced by theologians trying to understand the hypostatic union; namely, would one consider Jesus, in the language of modern psychology, as

Spirit in relationship to Jesus. Finally, Lloyd criticizes Owen for showing very "little interest in the world of nature," the result being that only "on very rare occasions" could Owen find "joy in the life of the present world."[33] This comment is somewhat justifiable when considering much of the tone of Owen's writings, but an appreciation of his anthroposensitive method may effect a reevaluation of this initial response. As we argue in the following chapters, Owen does have a significant place for delight, satisfaction, rest, and joy, all possible in "this world." Yet these experiences, according to Owen, only make sense in light of Christological and Trinitarian observations – again reflecting his unwillingness to divorce theological reflections from anthropological concerns. With this in mind, looking at the affective language and imagery Owen uses to describe God's love for his people and their enjoyment of fellowship with him, an austere portrait of this Puritan will be shown to be unfair. Beyond Lloyd's work only a minor and extremely brief study appears before mid-century.[34]

William Ward Bass provides the next significant study, this time from a particularly philosophical viewpoint.[35] He surveys the writings of three distinguished Puritan authors: John Owen, Richard Baxter, and John Howe. Bass seeks to explain what influence the rise of Platonism in seventeenth century England had upon these different men. While he argues for various degrees of platonic influence (or one might better say *structure*) in Baxter and Owen, he finds it profusely in Howe, who incidentally was appointed around 1650 by Owen to serve at Great Torrington in Devonshire.[36] While Bass's methodology suffers at times from an unnecessarily broad view of Platonism, occasionally causing him to overstep his evidence, he does rightly see within Puritan theology a prominent place for the various faculties:

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having multiple personalities? Lloyd obviously thinks Owen cannot adequately answer this type of question.

[33] Lloyd, 345.

[34] See J. C. W. Davis, "John Owen, D.D.: Puritan Preacher and Ecclesiastic Statesman. With a Particular Reference to his Proposals for a Settlement of Religion and his Views on Toleration," (M.A. thesis, Liverpool University, 1949). This work is brief, but receives mention simply to illustrate the beginning of a renewed interest in John Owen's life and theology. Hereafter, no reference shall be made to the large and growing M.A. and Th.M. research on Owen.

[35] Bass, "Platonic Influences on Seventeenth Century English Puritan Theology as Expressed in the Thinking of John Owen, Richard Baxter, and John Howe," (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1958).

[36] Bass, 212. While Bass does not mention a date, Henry Rogers, *The Life and Character of John Howe, M.A.: With an Analysis of his Writings* (New Edition, London, 1862), deduces a probable time period, 28. Cf. *DNB*.

particularly the mind, will, and affections. Though he never explores the relationship in detail, he aligns the image of God with these faculties.[37] As we will see later in our study, what happens to the *imago Dei* has a direct impact on the faculties. One cannot understand the *imago Dei* without noting the importance of the faculties, for, as we will argue, these are understood not mechanistically but rather as the means by which relationship with the other is possible.

Shortly after Bass's work, Don Everson completed a dissertation which serves as the earliest attempt to systematize Owen's theology.[38] It covers a broad spectrum of theological material: scripture, God's names and attributes, the Trinity, incarnation, sin, Christology, faith, apostasy, the Church, the problem of schism, baptism, the Lord's Supper, officers in the Church, Liturgy, prayer, even Church and State relations! As one might predict, the scope of this study is both its greatest strength and its most serious weakness. It remains a cursory treatment. Though others have attempted to provide improved surveys of Owen's thought, and have succeeded to some degree, all continue to struggle with the problem that Everson discovered – it is hard to systematize and adequately discuss twenty-four volumes and a multitude of topics in less than four hundred pages. Owen did not produce a textbook on Systematic Theology, but rather wrote occasional pieces meant to deal with particular theological and human problems that had arisen. On anthropology, our primary focus, there are no noteworthy insights or questions to be found in Everson's work.

The minor interest shown in the 1950's gave way to a cluster of studies in the 1960's and early 1970's. The first bunch included many studies that only considered Owen as a secondary figure, but soon entire monographs were dedicated to Owen.[39] In the tradition of Everson, Godfrey Noel Vose embarked on another survey, this time focusing upon four main doctrines in Owen's theology: Scripture, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and Soteriology.[40] Through these four headings, Vose attempts to capture the essence of Owen's thought. One of the enduring strengths of this dissertation is its

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[37] See for example Bass, 75, 110, 116.

[38] Everson, "The Puritan Theology of John Owen," (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1959).

[39] For a few studies which only deal with Owen in a minor way, see Hideo Oki, "Ethics in Seventeenth Century English Puritanism," (Th.D. diss., Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1960); James Leroy Shields, "The Doctrine of Regeneration in English Puritan Theology, 1604-1689" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1965).

[40] Vose, "Profile of a Puritan: John Owen, 1616-1683," (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1963).

exploration of Owen's conception of the church – an area that continues to merit fuller exposition.[41] Vose claims that Owen is the 'Cyprian of Congregationalism' because of his surprisingly high view of the church and her role in the extension of God's salvation.[42] He notes the Church's integral place in Owen's teleological estimation of man; humanity was originally designed to worship God, and this most appropriately occurs within a community.[43] Though Vose deals briefly with Christian experience under the heading of the Holy Spirit, noticeably absent is a full exposition of Owen's anthropology.

Dewey D. Wallace Jr., who would become a noted historian of English theology for this period, also made his introduction to scholarly research through an investigation into Owen's thought through 1660.[44] According to Wallace, Owen was consumed with a passion to defend the 'Protestant core': this included "those concepts of free-grace, justification by faith, and assurance which were protected by the doctrine of predestination."[45] These central tenets of Calvinistic Puritan theology inform numerous elements of their worldview, and therefore, it is here that Owen draws a line in the sand.[46] Owen rigorously opposes not simply the abstract technicalities of Arminianism, but more significantly how this different worldview endangers Christian experience. God's sovereignty is called into question, man's sinfulness is minimized, assurance becomes unthinkable, justification becomes 'works' dependent and countless other undesirable consequences result from this alteration. In Wallace's later publication, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525-1695*, he painstakingly follows this Protestant core of belief in England from its inception to its final marginalization from the mainstream.[47] We will inevitably see how these core concerns for Owen interrelate to his conception of the human relationship between the Creator and his creation. This is discovered not primarily in the language of predestination, but rather more readily in Owen's description of communion with the Triune God.

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[41] For his discussion of the church, see Vose, 182-247.

[42] Vose, 247.

[43] Vose, 207.

[44] Wallace, "The Life and Thought of John Owen to 1660: A Study of the Significance of Calvinist Theology in English Puritanism," (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1965).

[45] Wallace, 98.

[46] Wallace, 100-03.

[47] Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protest Theology, 1525-1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

Investigating one of the four areas highlighted by Vose, Dale Arden Stover focused on Owen's pneumatology in a 1967 dissertation.[48] In many ways Stover's work represents the first major attempt to address the possible disjunction between Owen and John Calvin.[49] Concentrating upon the Holy Spirit, Stover examines how this Puritan divine handles the subjective/objective dimensions of the Christian faith.[50] His study leads him to the "revolutionary conclusion" that Owen and English Calvinists held "an anthropological theology," whereas Calvin clearly represented a Christocentric theology.[51] Given Owen's extensive pneumatology and covenantal emphasis, Stover maintains that Owen's theology would inevitably end up anthropocentric.[52] Additionally, Owen's Trinitarian thought tended to emphasize the distinct role of each person of the Trinity to the neglect of a coherent unified triune God Christologically grounded.[53] Stover says that because Owen was concerned with how each person of the Trinity *distinctly related to the believer*, his theology was generated from an anthropocentric base. He goes on to claim that Owen "omitted the humanity of Christ," whereas Calvin emphasized "the body of Christ as the ground of the Spirit's relation to believers."[54] Likewise, he believed that Owen divorced the Spirit from his incarnational theology. This divorce wreaked havoc on Owen's anthropology, according to Stover, leading to an "emphasis on the spiritual side of man's being – a stress on the soul at the expense of the body." For Stover, this ultimately leads to man's "dehumanization."[55] Finally, throughout Stover's work one finds references to human faculties. He argues that sin is primarily focused on the will and affections, rather than the mind.[56] One particularly insightful comment that

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[48] Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen: A Study of the Role of the Holy Spirit in Relation to the Shape of a Theology," (Ph.D. diss., McGill University in Canada, 1967). Another study on Owen's Pneumatology, although much smaller in scope and detail, appeared in Britain a year earlier: Peter N. L. Pytches, "A Critical Exposition of the Teaching of John Owen on the Work of the Holy Spirit in the Individual," (M.Litt. thesis, Bristol University, 1966).

[49] Before Stover, William H. Chalker addressed this apparent difference between Calvin and the leading Puritan theologians with only passing notice given to Owen, since his attention centered on William Perkins, William Ames, Thomas Shepard, Elisha Coles, and John Howe. See his, "Calvin and Some Seventeenth Century English Calvinists–A Comparison of Their Doctrines of the Knowledge of God, Faith, and Assurance," (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1961).

[50] Stover, 10.

[51] Stover, 303, 46-9.

[52] Stover, 211, 301.

[53] E.g., Stover, 304. Cf. 209, where the Spirit "has usurped the role of Christ."

[54] Stover, 304.

[55] Stover, 305. Cf. Bass, 117.

[56] Stover, 55. He has overestimated the Puritan value of reason when he later states, "It would seem that reason judged revelation more surely than revelation judged reason," 56. However,

Stover contributes regarding human faculties is that they serve as the 'locus' for the similarity that exists between man and God in Owen's theology.[57]

The anthropology in Stover's study remains ambiguously broad and undefined, resulting in a flexibility that may not appropriately apply to Owen's thought. For example, Joel Beeke flatly, and consciously, contradicts Stover by arguing that Owen's theology is "theocentric" rather than anthropocentric.[58] Both authors may be closer than they realize – each acknowledging Owen's obvious concern for the human condition. Where they differ is about what *drives* Owen's theology: is it an overriding concern for the glory of God or for the salvation and sanctification of man? Obviously the two ideas have tremendous overlap and nuance becomes all the more important to avoid confusion. Suffice it to say, Stover has marked the importance of an anthropological perspective in Owen's work. Any study of Owen's anthropology must address Stover's concerns: human interaction with the Triune God, the humanity of Christ, man's supposed 'dehumanization,' and the leading role of human faculties. Our study seeks to demonstrate many conclusions that are directly opposed to Stover's analysis. Owen is not 'anthropological' without being Christocentric; rather, his robust Christology permeates every aspect of his thought, including his conception that being human must be primarily understood in terms of relations with God. Contrary to Stover's belief, Owen does not neglect the humanity of Christ, but stands in awe of how the incarnation affirms true solidarity with the rest of humanity. Rather than 'dehumanized,' we see Owen attempting to arrange a holistic anthropology by using the intellectual furniture available to him in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, against the charge of Stover, Owen's Trinitarian emphasis of the distinct roles of the three divine persons does not weaken his Christology, but actually may be understood as strengthening it. This will quickly become apparent in the amount of emphasis he gives to communion with the Son in his book on *Communion with God*.[59] Christ is the mediator between God and humanity, and through him relations between the divine and human are secure.

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note that elsewhere he is more cautious and recognizes that sin and regeneration do indeed affect each of the faculties, 224.

[57] Stover, 246.

[58] Joel Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 221.

[59] Owen, *Works*, 2: 5-274.

While the studies up to this point have focused primarily upon aspects of Owen's theology, Peter Toon has served Owen scholarship well by updating the discussion surrounding Owen's life in relationship to his contemporary setting and controversies. In 1970 Toon published *The Correspondence of John Owen (1616-1683): With an Account of his Life and Work.*[60] Here the reader is allowed easy access to Owen as an historical figure, rather than as an abstract theologian. Owen interacts with real people, with real concerns, in real time. His tremendous influence in seventeenth century England is shown clearly by noting some of those he corresponds with: General Monk, Oliver and Richard Cromwell, members of Parliament, the Governor of Massachusetts, Richard Baxter, etc. Here we find a more well rounded man interacting with those who represent military, political, educational, and theological leadership.

In 1971, Toon published two more books relating to Owen. The first was an English translation of Owen's Oxford Orations, found in their original Latin in volume sixteen of the Goold edition.[61] The second demonstrates Toon's previous research in the form of the best Owen biography to date, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen.*[62] Here we find Toon following Owen's life from student days at Oxford, to leadership at Christ Church, to celebrated Nonconformist author. Whereas earlier Congregationalist historians tended to view Owen from an overtly partisan perspective and usually with an eye always toward his theological writings, Toon breaks the established pattern. While Toon sometimes remains too distant from Owen's theological writings, his historically sensitive biography remains the most accessible point of entry into understanding the 'historical Owen.'

Two further dissertations added to an understanding of Owen's life, usually by means of stressing Owen's political involvement. Sarah Cook's research endeavors to explain how Owen's religious convictions deeply influenced his political

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[60] (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1970).

[61] *The Oxford Orations of Dr. John Owen*, ed. Peter Toon (Cornwall: Gospel Communications, 1971). For the Latin Orations, see *Works*, 16:480-514.

[62] (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1971). To understanding Owen's continuing popularity at the laymen level, one should note that there were also popular biographies written around this time. See for example, Peter Baraclough, *John Owen, 1616-1683* (London: Independent Press, 1961); R. Glynne Lloyd, *John Owen–Commonwealth Puritan* (Liverpool: Modern Welsh Publications, 1972).

behavior.[63] Several major themes run through this dissertation. First, she argues that Owen's political involvement was 'incidental to his Christian life'. Second, she follows the tense and complex relationship the Independent Owen maintained with the Presbyterians. Third, Cook explores Owen's relationship with the military in a way previously undeveloped by earlier biographers. Fourth, she briefly analyzes the 'organized party activity of Independent clergymen', calling attention to Owen's significant role within this group. Finally, she reveals new aspects of Owen's personal life; this yields some fascinating insights into his ambitions and struggles. What Cook believes she discovers in her study of Owen is "a politically vigorous and influential man, who believed himself to be guided solely by the truths which shone forth in Scripture."[64] Cook's work is useful in the historical insight it provides.

Following Cook, Lloyd G. Williams's work may be more theologically satisfying.[65] Although mostly historical, this study highlights how Owen's theology influences his life, most particularly in the relationship between eschatology and politics. Williams argues that, even before 1650 when Owen was appointed preacher to the Council of State and a chaplain to Cromwell, Owen held a strong belief that the welfare of England as a nation was intertwined with the welfare of the saints and churches which were in the country. This belief was grounded in his strong Calvinistic understanding of providence.[66] However, Owen and Cromwell alike were severely disillusioned by the failure of the Barebones Parliament.[67] Owen's previous optimism about the coming glory began to dwindle and he started to view the end-times as far into the future, rather than imminent as he had once perceived.[68] According to Owen, human response to God influences eschatological realities, for although God maintains his sovereignty, he also responds to repentance (or to a lack thereof).

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[63] Sarah Gibbard Cook, "A Political Biography of a Religious Independent: John Owen, 1616-1683," (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1972), 2, 387. Cf. Idem, "Congregational Independents and the Cromwellian Constitution," *CH* 44 (Se 1977), 335-57.

[64] Cook, "Biography," 20-22. For discussions of these five areas, see *passim*.

[65] Lloyd G. Williams, "'Digitus Dei:' God and Nation in the Thought of John Owen: A Study in English Puritanism and Nonconformity, 1653-1683," (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1981).

[66] L. G. Williams, 21.

[67] L. G. Williams, 62. Cf. Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (London: Harper, 1970), 141-43; idem, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 170-78.

[68] Cf. L. G. Williams, 69 ff., 222.

> Imperfect present and ideal future were, in Owen's mind, creatively accommodated to each other. The future would purify and fulfill the anomalous present; the present, with all its failings, could be utilized to prepare for the future. Incongruities in the present could be tolerated for they would eventually be removed in the future. Even if God should postpone the future because of human sin, it still remained 'near' to the eye of faith. It still retained its relevance. If the future were postponed Owen would simply reassess the situation and do the work appropriate to that generation.[69]

Owen proved a surprisingly flexible thinker who adapted to new situations by urging toleration and social peace.[70]

Although the work of Toon, Cook, and Williams is primarily biographical, this does not hamper their utility for our present study. Whatever one thinks of contemporary Postmodern debate and dialogue, one result has been that the academy has solidified its resolve to view the history of ideas as more than simply cognitive movements. One's personal life experiences largely contribute to the shape of one's thought. Acknowledging this reality, Owen's thought cannot be divorced from his life and the influences upon him. Here was a man who apparently struggled with pride, ambition, the death of numerous children and a first wife, a disrupted academic – and one might also say political – career, etc. Historical research and analysis provide insights into some of the possible existential roots of Owen's anthropological reflections. What consistently emerges is a picture of a talented and influential man of his times who sought to promote his understanding of communion with God.

Returning to research that has focused primarily upon Owen's theology, it is crucial to note the influence of Sinclair Ferguson. His significance remains important at several levels. First, after slight alterations, his dissertation was published, thus reaching a far wider audience than previous theological discussions of Owen's work.[71] Ferguson's original desire was to "do for John Owen what [R. S.] Wallace has done for Calvin" in his study of *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life.*[72] In other

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[69] L. G. Williams, 327.

[70] L. G. Williams writes the remarkable commendation: "Owen's particular understanding of collective theology, especially his belief in the toleration of dissent within a loose religious framework, aided in the development not of medieval conformity but of the greatest religious and social pluralism that England had ever seen till that time," 153.

[71] Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987).

[72] Sinclair Ferguson, "The Doctrine of the Christian Life in the Teaching of Dr. John Owen (1616-1683): Chaplain to Oliver Cromwell and Sometime Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford," (Ph.D. diss., Aberdeen, 1979), 3. He is referring R. S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1959).

words, Ferguson's goal was to organize this Puritan's theology in a practical manner, following Owen's thought logically by beginning with his understanding of the various covenants and ending with the doctrine of perseverance. The second benefit of Ferguson's study was that while it served as a non-intimidating source of introduction for the educated layman, it also became the standard reference for those interested in pursuing Owen studies further. What Ferguson's study lacks in its negligible interaction with other secondary literature and tracing the roots (besides Calvin) of Owen's thought is compensated for in its structure. One can use Ferguson's reliable book as an accurate reference point for quickly determining where to begin a particular topical study in Owen's voluminous writings. Finally, the third important aspect of Ferguson's influence is found in the culmination of the above points. Ferguson has become an impetus for newer Owen scholarship that endeavors to relate Owen's theology to Christian experience. As a result of his influence a series of dissertations began to surface from Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, where Ferguson taught. There have been five significant contributions from Westminster to date and each will be dealt with individually.[73]

Richard Mitchell Hawkes explores Owen's comprehensive theology of grace. He openly acknowledges that his efforts provide a biased account of Owen's thought, including a defense of Owen's conclusions.[74] Hawkes follows his 'logic of grace' through three main criteria: the means of grace, the matter of grace, and the manner of grace.[75] In other words, one is to see how the grace of an infinite and immutable God may be understood by finite and mutable creation; then, Hawkes examines the ground for this grace, concluding with the reception of grace in Christian believers. Although Hawkes displays an appreciation for the importance of the faculties in Owen's theology, he does not develop the idea to any great length.[76] While using grace as a matrix for understanding Owen is a correct instinct, we believe the picture requires a great deal more detail before it is complete. For example, Owen's view of the

[73] It should be noted that Ferguson was not always the primary supervisor for the theses, but his influence is apparent throughout.

[74] Hawkes, "The Logic of Grace in John Owen, D.D.: An Analysis, Exposition, and Defense of John Owen's Puritan Theology of Grace," (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1987), x-xii.

[75] Hawkes, ix.

[76] Hawkes, E.g., 52, 283, 306-07. At one point he describes faith as a faculty, 85, 89.

humanity of Christ and his Trinitarian framework need further development, as chapters three and five will demonstrate.

Two studies from Westminster immediately followed Hawkes, each using Owen as a test case for their wider interests. Jonathan Jong-Chun Won sought to explore the relationship between Calvin and the English Puritans (i.e., William Perkins, Richard Sibbes, John Cotton, Thomas Goodwin, John Owen) concerning the themes of 'union' and 'communion.'[77] Using their various attitudes toward the Lord's Supper for comparison, Won argues that Calvin tended to stress the believer's *union* with Christ, whereas the Puritans emphasized the believer's *communion* with the Savior. "Calvin saw this communion more in terms of cultivating assurance of faith in Christ," whereas the Puritans "saw it more as Christ's channel for comforting and encouraging Christians struggles."[78] Won is right in making a distinction at this point as long as it is acknowledged that the Calvinistic Puritans never divorce communion from union, but base the former on the latter. We will explore this theme in some detail in chapter five.

While Won's overall assessment stresses the continuity between Calvin and Puritan theologians, he also discovers some discontinuity. Three of these discontinuities have particular relevance for our study. First, he notes that the Puritans "capitalized on the humanness of Christ" for the purpose of emphasizing that the incarnate one truly understood the believer's struggles and pain. Second, the Puritans maintained an element of the mystical tradition within their theology, especially as expressed in their "affectionate spirituality" which they used to describe the "intimate relationship between Christ and believers."[79] Won rightly acknowledges through these points the importance of human affections within the thought of the various Puritans he surveys. For example, he accurately traces Sibbes's elaboration of the affections of Christ, as well as the affections of believers.[80] He also highlights Thomas Goodwin's captivation with the emotions of believers and Jesus – emotions that only increased after the ascension. Regarding Owen, Won perceptively recognizes that the ascended Christ continues to possess a human body

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[77] Jonathan John-Chun Won, "Communion with Christ: An exposition and comparison of the doctrine of union and communion with Christ in Calvin and the English Puritans" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1989).

[78] Won, 350.

[79] Won, 353.

[80] Won, 154-69.

and continues to use his faculties; this reality ought to assist believers in their relationship with their Savior.[81] Furthermore, he notes that Owen attributes unique significance to the humanity of Jesus as "the ultimate expression of divine love."[82] Throughout our study we explore this idea in far more detail. This brings us to the third point: Won believes that while Calvin uses the Lord's Supper as the particular place to describe communion with Christ, the Puritans usually discuss the topic in the context of soteriology.[83] We will discover in chapter six that Owen does actually connect his ideas of communion with God with his view of the Lord's Supper. Due to the survey nature of Won's study, his research points in the right direction without having the space to move more specifically in that direction.

Joel R. Beeke, another former doctoral student of Westminster, also employs Owen as a primary subject in his study. He traces the concept of assurance from Calvin, through the English Puritans, and also in comparison with the theological leaders of the Second Dutch Reformation.[84] Identifying itself with the ongoing debate about Post-Reformation Reformed thinkers, Beeke's study attempts to demonstrate that, although there are different emphases, both Calvin and his Puritan followers maintained a biblically accurate and experientially sensitive account of assurance.[85] He concludes that the post-Reformers went beyond Calvin by tending to develop and clarify the doctrine of assurance "both pastorally and theologically – from a Christological to a Trinitarian framework." In other words, even amidst their differences, Calvin, the Puritans, and the Dutch Reformers all agreed on one fundamental truth: "Assurance of salvation ought to be regarded as the possession of all Christians in principle, despite varying measures of consciousness."[86]

For our purposes, we need simply to note how Beeke demonstrates Owen's handling of the objective/subjective tension within the Christian experience. Owen does not want to rationalize the faith whereby believers are only required to

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[81] Won, 275.

[82] Won, 284.

[83] Additionally, the greatest discontinuity he notes stems from the Puritan tendency to allegorize the Song of Songs, which he argues is foreign to Calvin's thought. See Won, 350-57.

[84] His original study was in the form of his dissertation that later evolved into an article and an expanded book. See Joel R. Beeke, "Personal Assurance of Faith: English Puritanism and the Dutch 'Nadere Reformatie' From Westminster to Alexander Comrie (1640-1760)" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1988); cf. Beeke, "Personal Assurance of Faith: The Puritans and Chapter 18:2 of the *Westminster Confession*," *WTJ* 55 (1993): 1-30; *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

[85] Beeke, (1991), 21.

intellectually acknowledge that they are children of God, nor does he want them to blindly trust their constantly changing emotions. Rather, Owen holds together the "reciprocal relationship" between what God has promised in Christ and what the believer experiences in his daily life.[87] These evidences work in conjunction, even when it is difficult to fully describe their association. When one attempts to reconstruct Owen's anthropology, it proves necessary to wrestle with the many facets of this existential tension.

The fourth study arising out of the 'Westminster School' specifically explored Owen's Christology, was penned by Richard W. Daniels.[88] This study serves as a massive compilation and assimilation (over 450 pages!) of Owen's material on Christology. Anyone considering any aspect of Owen's thought related to the second person of the Trinity may find it helpful to begin with this overview. Daniels's work is also noteworthy in that it is one of the few which interacts with Owen's massive commentary on Hebrews – a segment of Owen's writings that inevitably becomes crucial for a full understanding of his anthropology as informed by his Christology. Although useful in the ways mentioned above, this dissertation is not the strongest of the four, as it can slip into repetitiveness and also lacks substantial analysis.

Two further studies also focus on different elements of Owen's Christology. Alan J. Spence's investigation is as an exceptional attempt to recognize Owen's distinct contribution to the history of Christology, arguing in the end that Owen helps to solve several contemporary Christological problems.[89] According to Spence, the Church has always struggled to hold together incarnational and inspirational Christology. The former tends to stress the *divinity of Christ*, whereas the latter emphasizes the *Spirit's inspiration* of the Son. When those in the Alexandrian school stressed the incarnation of the Word to the neglect of inspiration they inevitably diminished the "full humanity of the experiences of Jesus."[90] Those in the Antiochene school who recognized Jesus' human nature as fully dependent upon the

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[86] Beeke, (1991), 366.

[87] Beeke, (1991), 168.

[88] Daniels, "'Great is the Mystery of Godliness': The Christology of John Owen" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1990).

[89] Spence, "Incarnation and Inspiration: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology" (Ph.D. diss., King's College London, 1989). See also his shorter studies, "Inspiration and Incarnation: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology," *KTR* 12 (1989): 52-55; "John Owen and Trinitarian Agency," *SJT* 43 (1990): 157-73; "Christ's Humanity and Ours: John Owen," in *Persons, Divine and Human*, ed. C. Schwöbel and Colin E. Gunton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991).

Spirit also tended to diminish the orthodox understanding of the incarnation.[91] According to Spence, Owen attempts anew to bring these two emphases together through "the integration of the concepts of Christ as the incarnate Word of God and as the Son inspired by the Spirit. . . . By incorporating them both, Owen's christology brings a measure of theological stability to the Definition of Chalcedon and also serves as a pointer to the trinitarian direction modern christology must take if its divisions are to be healed."[92] Spence's work serves as a springboard for our study regarding Owen's discussions of the humanity of Christ, the Son of God who nevertheless still hungered, thirsted, prayed, and wept. As Jesus receives an extensive treatment in Owen's writings as the one who is fully divine and fully human, we must recognize the significance of Owen's Christology as profoundly informing his anthropology. In chapter three we see that the incarnate Christ reestablishes unhindered relations between God and humanity, and that to be justified, in chapter four, one must be united to the person of Christ.

The third study on Owen's Christology written in the late 1980's concentrates on Jesus as the Great High Priest. Here we find a much needed discussion regarding Owen's dealings with Arminianism and Socinianism. Robert K. M. Wright, the author, demonstrates Owen's zealous drive to guard the orthodox conception of the atonement from the rising "threat to Owen's Calvinism."[93] Wright also provides a fair introduction to Owen's theological method and style as demonstrated in his neglected commentary on *Hebrews*.[94]

Although Wright's work contributes to our understanding of the turbulent theological climate of Owen's writings, this investigation adds little to the above discussions of Owen's Christology. This is due to Wright's tendency to summarize

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[90] Spence, "Incarnation and Inspiration," 26.

[91] Spence, "Incarnation and Inspiration," 185-86.

[92] Spence, "Incarnation and Inspiration," 211. Elsewhere, after sketching Owen's understanding of the Spirit's work in the life of Christ, Spence enthusiastically observes: "What is so interesting about Owen's exposition of the person of Christ in terms of the Spirit's inspiration, is that it took place within the context of an incarnational christology. It appears to me that this was the first time since the brilliant defence of the Christian faith by Irenaeus in the second century, that a theologian with an 'orthodox' understanding of the incarnation had recognised so clearly what it meant for Christ as a man to be inspired by the Holy Spirit," 82.

[93] See Robert K. M. Wright, "John Owen's Great High Priest: The Highpriesthood of Christ in the Theology of John Owen, (1616-1683)" (Ph.D. diss., The Iliff School of Theology and University of Denver, 1989), 132-75, 186-209 for his discussions regarding Owen and Socinianism and 79-130 for his description of Owen's arguments against the rising tide of Arminianism.

[94] Wright, 177 ff.

large portions of Owen's writings rather than truly interacting with them. Additionally, this study's concentration upon the Priesthood of Christ has a tendency to focus on the divinity of Christ, often leaving the humanity somewhat overlooked. Wright's primary concern is to show that the Highpriesthood was *the* unifying theme in Owen's theology.[95] Although this doctrine is vital in Owen's theology, one wonders if Wright's enthusiasm caused him to overestimate the centrality of his subject. Surely all students of Owen will recognize the Highpriesthood of Christ as crucial to Owen's theology, but if one had to choose *a single unifying theme,* other more general options are at least as possible.[96]

Another dissertation written near the end of the 1980's proposed to compare Owen and Richard Baxter's view of the human will. Gavin McGrath progresses through the thorny complexity of theological discussions of human freedom, providing a historical study that one wishes were published for a broader readership.[97] Crucial to his study is his proposed definition of voluntarism: "The prominence, but not the dominance, of the will's response to God's sovereign initiatives in the divine/human encounter."[98] He is responding to R. T. Kendall's "erroneous" definition of voluntarism; McGrath believes Kendall presents an unnecessary chasm between "faith resting in a passive persuasion of the mind and faith as an act of the will [that] is too neat and tidy."[99] McGrath's research seeks to detail a more accurate estimation of Puritan views of the human will.

Possibly the greatest merit of McGrath's study comes from its successful depiction of Owen and Baxter's theology as growing out of a heritage, rather than as existing in an historical vacuum. He argues from the outset that while Owen and Baxter do make certain contributions to "the discussion of the human will, they were also inheritors of traditions which more than anything established the 'framework' or 'agenda' for their voluntarism."[100] These Puritan divines developed their theology from a historical line of thinking which is traceable from Augustine and Aquinas,

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[95] Wright, 217, 218.

[96] For example, the glory of God, or the more unifying theme of communion with God – a suggestion that the present author must admit he finds to be possibly the most satisfying. Nevertheless, we also must beware of our own blinding enthusiasm!

[97] Gavin McGrath, "Puritans and the Human Will: Voluntarism within Mid-seventeenth Century English Puritanism as Seen in the Works of Richard Baxter and John Owen" (Ph.D. diss., University of Durham, 1989).

[98] McGrath, 3.

[99] McGrath, 5. We will briefly discuss Kendall's book below.

affected by Scotus and Ockham, modified by Luther and Calvin, and eventually applied in seventeenth century England. What McGrath finds, amidst the differences between Baxter and Owen, was that they both believed in the role of secondary agency, nevertheless tending to emphasize God's sovereign will. "Baxter and Owen accepted the premise that in order to consider the freedom of humanity in choosing and acting it was essential to begin with a consideration of the divine will. God's will was the point of reference. Man's will chose in relation to God's will, either in obedience or disobedience."[101] Concerning differences, Baxter tended to put the emphasis upon the condition of the covenant as that of faith, while Owen continuously emphasized the unilateral nature of the covenant. For Owen, faith was not the fulfillment of the covenant, but the acceptance of the *One* who personally and perfectly fulfilled the requirements of it, making a restored relationship with the Creator possible. Even so, McGrath argues persuasively that the "profound necessity of human response" permeates the writings of both men.[102] Here we find possibly his strongest chapter emerging; it describes the practical side of voluntarism.[103] The believer lives properly when he has a willingness to respond to God and a life of holiness.[104] The conclusion reached in this research claims that voluntarism "was at the centre of Puritan piety . . . because at the heart of practical Christian living it was recognized that part of what it meant to be a moral human being involved choice."[105] McGrath's investigation helps remind us that Owen was not satisfied with a robotic presentation of humanity – even though this is often the stereotype portrayed of Puritan theologians. Rather, Owen preferred to see a dynamic relationship existing between the sovereign Creator and his living creation, an insight, which if neglected, would severely impoverish our study of Owen's anthropology.

Moving to the 1990's we find an intensified interest in the debate regarding Owen's theological relationship to John Calvin. The appearance of Alan C. Clifford's book serves as the primary example of the position which argues that Owen distorted

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[100] McGrath, 74-75.

[101] McGrath, 182. McGrath also notes their disagreement regarding the conditions of the covenant and the satisfaction provided by the death of Christ, 183.

[102] McGrath, 194-95, 210.

[103] McGrath, 293-343. This serves a as excellent complementary study to Gleason's, which is examined below. Note that Gleason does not interact with McGrath, apparently unaware of his dissertation.

[104] Cf. McGrath, 283-84, 370, 388.

[105] McGrath, 391.

the biblical message of Calvin.[106] Clifford consciously saw himself as the one who picked up where R. T. Kendall's provocative book, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649,* left off.[107] Therefore a brief look at Kendall is necessary to understanding Clifford.

Kendall notes, in the Preface to the first edition, that his original desired dissertation topic (of which his book was its published form) was John Owen's conception of Christ's priestly work. However, after studying Owen's predecessors, Kendall was so "surprised" by his findings that he "never got to Owen." [108] Instead, he argued that the English Calvinism before Owen showed a fundamental departure from Calvin, most particularly regarding the doctrines of faith, assurance, and the atonement. Kendall follows what may be best described as the theological evolution from Calvin to Beza, through Perkins, Baynes, Sibbes, Cotton, Hooker, Arminius and Ames, ending with the Westminster Assembly, where he concludes by making the bold claim that "Westminster theology hardly deserves to be called Calvinistic."[109] While most of Kendall's research lies outside the parameters of the present study, his work remains significant because of the way it influenced Clifford.[110]

Clifford asserts from the outset that his "book is chiefly intended as a reply to John Owen." Though earlier in his life he was a follower of Owen-style 'five-point' Calvinism, his research – like Kendall before him – caused him to change his views, claiming that "my conclusions surprised no one more than myself."[111] He describes four theologians for comparative purposes: John Owen, Richard Baxter, John

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[106] Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

[107] Kendall, originally published by Oxford Press, 1981. In 1997 Paternoster reprinted it with a new Preface and two Appendixes.

[108] Kendall, x.

[109] Kendall, 212.

[110] Kendall's controversial work seemed to begin an industry of publications from both sides of the debate. Countless dissertations, articles, sections in books, etc. address different aspects of Kendall's thesis. The following are a few examples of reviews: W. Standford Reid, *WTJ*, 43 (1980): 155-64; A. N. S. Lane, *Themelios*, 6 (1980): 29-31; A. Skevington Wood, *EQ*, 53 (Ap-Je, 1981): 124-25; Paul Helm, "Article Review: Calvin, English Calvinism and the Logic of Doctrinal Development," *SJT* 34 (1981): 179-85; Dewey D. Wallace, *CH*, 50 (S, 1981): 348-49; George Harper, *CTJ* 20 (1985): 255-62; Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982); M. Charles Bell, *SJT*, 36 (1983): 535-40.

[111] Clifford, vii, viii. For example, one need only note one of his conclusions: "Whereas Owen seems quite oblivious to Calvin's theology of justification, Wesley derived his knowledge of Calvin via the Arminian Puritan John Goodwin's treatise *Imputatio fidei* (1642). Both Goodwin and Arminius claimed to concur with Calvin's sentiments. This would suggest that the Arminians rather than the scholastic Calvinists were the true heirs of Calvin, a thought which surely demands a redrawing of the theological map," 179.

Tillotson, and John Wesley. Showing the differences between the theologians, Clifford reveals his agenda in more precise detail later in his exposition:

> This book seeks to demonstrate that the main cause of the Calvinist-Arminian controversy was the re-emergence of Aristotelian scholasticism within Reformed theological thought. Once Beza's exaggerated orthodoxy gained ground, it was inevitable that the equally exaggerated Arminian reaction should set in. In the ensuing controversy John Owen became the undoubted champion of the Bezan school; he was inaccurately regarded as 'the Calvin of England.' Sufficient evidence has been adduced to indicate that the reformers would not recognize Owen's doctrine of the atonement as their own.[112]

Clifford goes so far as to claim: "Owen was governed more by Aristotelian than by Scriptural considerations. He actually imported alien philosophical criteria into his exposition of the gospel."[113] Even as Clifford emphasizes Owen's use of Aristotelian structure and method, he also acknowledges what he considers to be Owen's later lament over "The Philosopher's" influence upon the Church through the ages.[114] Although controversial throughout, it is primarily Clifford's attention to Owen's scholasticism that has evoked a sharp response and an intense reexamination of Owen's methodology and influences. While no formal discussion of Owen's anthropology takes place, we must nevertheless appreciate the questions Clifford raises: first, Owen's place in the history of theology; second, Owen's methodology. Our reading of the sources differs from Clifford, as will be apparent in subsequent chapters. Owen's methodology throughout his corpus appears more accurately understood as anthroposensitive than simply Aristotelian, and Owen's ideas for the most part – at least he believes – are biblical and catholic rather than novel.

Before reviewing two substantial works that purposefully set out to challenge Clifford's conclusions, the research of Randall C. Gleason, Michael W. Bobick, and David Wai-Sing Wong deserves mention.

In Gleason's study we find yet another scholar attempting to understand Owen's relationship to his Calvinistic heritage. Gleason's work, *John Calvin and John Owen on Mortification: A Comparative Study in Reformed Spirituality,* serves as

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[112] Clifford, 82. Clifford later published, *Calvinus: Authentic Calvinism, A Clarification* (Norwich: Charenton Reformed Publishing, 1996), which serves mostly as an anthology of Calvin quotes which he thinks should end the argument regarding Calvin's view of the atonement. He likewise has four appendixes where he responds to individual critics. For possibly the best study positing the opposing viewpoint, see Roger Nicole, "John Calvin's View of the Extent of the Atonement," *WTJ* 47 (1985), 197-225.

[113] Clifford, 98.

[114] See Clifford, 95-110.

a careful analysis of a narrow aspect of each man's theology.[115] Gleason's work begins with an objective survey of the literature of 'Calvin-versus-Calvinism'; he focuses upon several heated areas of debate: scholasticism, covenant theology, the extent of the atonement, and finally, faith's relationship to assurance.[116] Yet, when he quickly surveys works that specifically discuss Owen and Calvin, he omits Clifford's important book which was published five years earlier.[117] Though this is an oversight, Gleason's study nevertheless provides helpful insight into the historical debate. Using mortification as his common point of contact, his conclusions support the idea that "English Calvinism developed quantitatively beyond, but not qualitatively contradictory to" Calvin's theology.[118]

Gleason raises several points of relevance in regards to our study of Owen's anthropology. First, he rightly notes that Owen's theology concerns the whole person; thus, even as sin affects the entire believer's being, so should sanctification.[119] Nevertheless he leaves this element of Owen's theology to passing comments, creating a space for a fuller treatment of Owen's holistic anthropology. Second, Gleason begins to capture the tension in Owen's understanding of the Christian experience, maintaining that there "is a delicate balance between the need for human diligence and the efficacious work of God's sanctifying grace. In this way, Owen affirms that the divine and human roles in sanctification must be viewed as complementary rather than contradictory."[120] Gleason is on the right track, for to be fully human in Owen's mind involves true harmony between the Spirit's empowerment and human response, and this is most clearly demonstrated in the incarnate Christ. However, since this study fails to discuss how this interaction

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[115] Gleason, (New York: Peter Lang, 1995). This was originally a Ph.D. dissertation at Dallas Theological Seminary.

[116] Gleason, 7-26. From 26-33 he briefly discusses several works that deal with the particular question of the continuity/discontinuity question between Calvin and Owen.

[117] He was aware of Clifford's article, "John Calvin and the Conessio Fidei Gallicana," *EQ* 58 (1986): 195-206. The answer may be that Gleason's bibliographical work was primarily done in the early stages of his doctoral research, and that during the lengthy time from the beginning of his research to seeing the book to publication he missed Clifford's *Atonement and Justification.*

[118] Gleason, 154. Gleason believes that there are four main points of continuity between the Genevan Reformer and the English divine. 1) Both believe that union with Christ "is the means through which Christ's benefits are channeled, thereby making mortification possible." 2) Both theologians "stress the need to distinguish between the dominion or absolute control of sin and its ongoing rebellion." 3) Calvin and Owen both "agree on the general character of mortification." 4) They also "agree that sanctification will follow justification and that we can expect God efficaciously and progressively to sanctify each and every believer." See 146 ff.

[119] Gleason, 95-96, 103, 111.

occurs in the incarnation, its discussion of the human experience is theologically limited. Finally, in this study one finds the best – though somewhat brief – discussion of Owen's view of sin yet available. All of the consequences of sin must be recognized to appreciate the human dilemma in a fallen world. Gleason accurately surveys Owen's description of the human struggle with sin's dominance in the unbeliever and indwelling sin within the converted.[121] As we will see, Owen's realistic – or one might say sober – view of sin greatly influences his anthropology by forcing him to emphasize the priority of divine movement followed by human response, and never the other way around.

Michael W. Bobick and David Wai-Sing Wong both concentrate on how the covenant theology found in Calvin is comparable with that discovered in Owen. Bobick's study argues that the discussion about Calvin and the Calvinists has only been moderately successful, since so few scholars have observed the different *exegetical* methodologies. Bobick is convinced that "method and content exist in a symbiotic relationship to one another."[122] With this in mind, his study serves as another comparison between Calvin and Owen, noting how their commitments to different methodologies influence their covenantal approaches. He argues that "the differences between Calvin's and Owen's theological formulations of the covenants are due in part to contrasting rhetorical approaches. Calvin adapts the Ciceronian model of classical rhetoric for his purposes, while Owen is essentially a plain style-Ramist for whom logic, understood as dialectic, replaces rhetoric."[123] This frees Calvin to give a prominence to God's promises, while Owen appears always to balance promise and threat. In order to make his case, Bobick spends considerable time outlining the role and limitation Aristotle's logic had on the two theologians, concluding that "the facile identification of John Owen as an 'Aristotelian' in contrast to John Calvin cannot bear the weight of investigation."[124] Instead, Bobick is persuaded that Owen is "a Semi-Ramist," the 'semi' indicating that Owen does not allow the Ramist method to become as prominent in his thought as found in other

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[120] Gleason, 106.

[121] Gleason, esp. 108-119.

[122] Michael William Bobick, "Owen's Razor: The Role of Ramist Logic in the Covenant Theology of John Owen (1616-1683)" (Ph.d. diss., Drew University, 1996), 8.

[123] Bobick, 12.

[124] Bobick, 120.

theologians like William Ames.[125] Even so, Owen does consistently employ a bifurcation methodology associated with Ramist logic, and Bobick believes this creates problems concerning the covenant that are absent from Calvin's thought. Two main consequences, according to Bobick, arise from Owen's semi-Ramist tendency: 1) Owen tends toward divisions (i.e., constant bifurcations) rather than historical development within biblical revelation;[126] 2) he has an inadequate view of the relationship between law and grace.[127] Accordingly, Bobick concludes that "threats of the law achieve a status equal to that of the promises," and although not a legalist, Owen does believe that "the duties of obedience *can and must* be placed in a parallel relationship to the passive faith which simply receives the gracious promise."[128] We will examine the relationship between God's gracious movement and human response throughout our study, especially in chapter four. Overall, the greatest contribution of Bobick's study is the helpful identification of Ramist logic in Owen's thought, and the potential dangers this raises for this Puritan's theology. Yet his findings should be read in conjunction with the more recent work of David Wai-Sing Wong, who represents the fifth contribution from the Westminster school.

Since Wong discusses many of the same covenant concerns as Bobick – though never wrestling with Ramist logic – we simply note his conclusion in passing: "There is a sense of harmony and beauty between Calvin's theology and Owen's covenant theology as the bones and the flesh of the body."[129] Wong argues that "Owen's covenant theology is not a speculative and scholastic construct. Its basic nature is an integration of Calvinistic orthodoxy and English piety."[130] And although not interacting with Bobick, Wong helpfully demonstrates the primacy of the "First Promise" over the covenant of works, thus calling into question the necessity of a parallel relationship between promise and threat.[131] Later Wong criticizes Owen's acceptance of the contemporary commercial model, as well as his "overemphasis on the continuity of the OT and NT."[132] These concerns are similar to Bobick's noted

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[125] Bobick, 170.
[126] Bobick, 236-39.
[127] Bobick, 240-46.
[128] Bobick, 241, 243. Emphasis his.
[129] Wong, "The Covenant Theology of John Owen" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998), 10.
[130] Wong, 139.
[131] Wong, 199 ff.
[132] Wong, 372, 377-82.

above. Readers hoping for a fair description of Owen's conception of the three covenants (i.e., works, redemption, and grace) will find Wong's work a reliable starting point. Nevertheless, we look to other studies beyond Bobick and Wong for fuller presentations of the context out of which Owen's thought develops.

Two of the most recent discussions to focus on Owen's thought attempt to understand the Puritan divine in his broader Post-reformation theological context. Both studies are clearly indebted to the pioneering work of Richard Muller. Muller's efforts have raised serious questions about many previously unchallenged assumptions. In many circles it had become axiomatic to presuppose a significant theological departure from the 'biblical' emphasis of the Reformers to the 'philosophical' emphasis in later Reformed scholasticism. Muller's basic thesis acknowledges differences, but it maintains that they are primarily structural and quantitative, rather than substantial and qualitative. In other words, the scholastics faced different challenges from a different context. They concerned themselves with exploring the ramifications of the insights discovered by the Reformers, a task the Reformers would have probably engaged in themselves had they lived another fifty years or more.

> Where the Reformers painted with a broad brush, their orthodox and scholastic successors strove to fill in the details of the picture. Whereas the Reformers were intent upon distancing themselves and their theology from problematic elements in medieval thought and, at the same time, remaining catholic in the broadest sense of that term, the Protestant orthodox were intent upon establishing systematically the normative, catholic character of institutionalized Protestantism, at times through the explicit use of those elements in patristic and medieval theology not at odds with the teachings of the Reformation.[133]

Muller's desire to see how Protestant scholastics "fill in the details" of their Reformation heritage finds expression in Owen scholarship through the recent writings of U. S. G. Rehnman and Carl Trueman.

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[133] Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 1: Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1987), 19. See also his "Calvin and the 'Calvinists': Assessing the Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Reformation and Orthodoxy," *CTJ* 30 (1995): 345-75 and 31 (1996): 125-60; *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988); *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 2: Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); *The Unaccommodated Calvin, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Rehnman's study focuses on Owen's methodology and epistemology.[134] Arguing for continuity along the lines of Muller, Rehnman traces the intellectual influences in Owen's thought as well as comparing Owen to other sixteenth and seventeenth century reformed theologians. There are several keys Rehnman uses to unlock the door to Owen's intellectual backroom. First, Rehnman provides the best discussion yet regarding how the intellectual climate at Queen's College Oxford might have influenced Owen. Second, Rehnman investigates how several specific teachers, particularly his tutor Thomas Barlow, might have also shaped his thought. Third, Rehnman notes key authors that Owen refers to throughout his works. Fourth, Rehnman exploits the neglected *Bibliotheca Oweniana sive catalogus* (1684), which is an exhaustive list of Owen's books composed by the auctioneers who sold Owen's library after his death. Finally, Rehnman focuses his research predominately on three of Owen's works: *The Reason of Faith*; *Causes, Ways and Means; Theologoumena pantodapa.*[135] Using these five components of Rehnman's research, our conception of Owen is made more complete.

What we see emerging is a "typical Renaissance man."[136] Four main strains of thought deeply influence Owen: Augustinianism, Aristotelianism, scholasticism, and humanism. Rehnman rightly notes that we must avoid the failure of some previous research that catalogues Reformed thought in this period as *one* of these, but never a mixture. Owen breaks the imposed molds by freely blending together these intellectual sources. Without hesitation we find Owen freely dialoguing with and building upon a diverse group of key thinkers: pagan philosophers, patristic authors, the medieval schoolmen, and the leaders of the Reformation. Future studies must wrestle with how the various influences impacted the particulars of Owen's thought.

Several points from Rehnman's study have direct bearing upon our investigation of Owen's anthropology. To begin, Rehnman argues that Puritanism demonstrates continuity with "Augustinian subjectivism"; this emphasis manifests itself continually throughout Puritan spirituality in their constant attempt to relate

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[134] Rehnman, "*Theologia Tradita*: A Study in the Prolegomenous Discourse of John Owen (1616-1683)" (D. Phil. diss., Oxford University, 1997).

[135] Rehnman acknowledges this himself, 16. One only wishes that the study might have continued by investigating how Owen's theological methodology works itself out in practice, specifically in his *Hebrews Commentary*, a work Rehnman rarely references.

[136] Rehnman, 56.

doctrine to experience.[137] Theology must not become empty speculation, but necessarily carries within it practical application – a reality that greatly informs Owen's anthropological concerns and touches the heart of our study. Furthermore, in an effort to combat misconceptions regarding reformed scholasticism, Rehnman places Owen's appreciation of *and* caution about reason in context. Here we find Rehnman seriously challenge the simplistic presupposition that reformed scholasticism was inevitably disguised rationalism. Owen highly valued the use of reason for the theological enterprise, but he also recognized many potential dangers, especially in the form of pagan philosophy. According to Rehnman, we find that Owen appeared to contain a more robust appreciation for philosophical discourse at the beginning of his career, with that confidence declining somewhat in his *Theologoumena*, only to reemerge near the end of his life as a possibly "more balanced view."[138]

Carl R. Trueman's research complements and often overlaps that of Rehnman.[139] Following Muller's stress on continuity, Trueman desires to avoid placing Owen in an historical vacuum. This is a complaint he has against earlier critics of Owen's theology, particularly the work of Alan Clifford. Trueman forcefully argues that Owen's use of Aristotelian language and structure should not be taken as significantly influencing his theology; this was the common method and language appropriated by seventeenth century theologians no matter what their theological perspective.[140] Using the atonement as an example, Trueman, *contra* Clifford, believes that Owen's use of Aristotelian categories was employed as a heuristic device rather than as the driving theological structure.[141] As another illustration of the shared methodology and language of the day, Trueman consistently uses Richard Baxter as a point of comparison, often arguing that Baxter embodies a more scholastic methodology than Owen.[142] For example, he briefly compares

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[137] Rehnman, 77-78.

[138] Rehnman, 200. See also Rehnman's seventh chapter, "The Study and Student of Theology: The Justification of Belief."

[139] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998).

[140] Cf. Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 11, 38.

[141] Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 233-40.

[142] E.g., Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 32. Cf. Trueman's later essay, "A Small Step Towards Rationalism: The Impact of the Metaphysics of Tommaso Campanella on the Theology of Richard Baxter," *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 181-95.

Baxter's faculty psychology with that of Owen's, claiming that the former's plays a much greater role in his overall theology. Baxter's "faculty psychology is given a structural importance which is absent from the work of Owen."[143] While we will highlight Owen's use of faculty language later, Trueman is correct in noting that Owen is not slavish to it. Our study demonstrates what Trueman seems to anticipate: the reason faculty psychology is significant for Owen has less to do with a dedication to Aristotle and more to do with Owen's attempt to find adequate language describing how humans may holistically respond to God. Another point from Trueman's research that contributes to our study is regarding Owen's structure of his most systematic work *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, which has a historical framework organized around the covenants. Trueman perceptively writes,

> Underlying this choice of organization is Owen's fundamental belief that theology *is relational*; that is, it depends upon the nature of the *relationship that exists between God the revealer and the one revealed, and humans, the recipients of that revelation*. In this context, the progressive nature of the covenant scheme serves to take account of the fact that *theology requires a divine-human relationship*, and that the biblical record shows that relationship has itself not been static but subject to historical movement, a movement which can be articulated by setting forth in order the key points at which God has explicitly defined his relationship with humanity: the various covenants which are found within the Bible.[144]

The relational emphasis is rightly highlighted here, since Owen's theology can never be divorced from his anthropology. This is why the term anthroposensitive was created and used for our study. Humanity's relationship to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was a dynamic concern for Owen, not an irrelevant point of theological debate. How creation, the fall, and redemption have affected this relationship will find exploration in our investigation of Owen's anthropology.[145]

Finally, the recent work from Australia by Jean Dorothy Williams deserves mention for two reasons. First, she attempts to use Owen and Richard Sibbes (among countless less important thinkers) as key examples of how the idea of 'enjoying God' permeated much of Puritan theology. Second, her emphasis on the significant role of

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[143] Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 80. He is here referring to Baxter's *Methodus Theologiae Christianae* (London, 1684). He later concludes that "Baxter's break with the more traditional faculty psychology of Owen, both in reference to humans and to God, represents a fundamental difference in basic metaphysics," 82.

[144] Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 49.

[145] Trueman discusses man before and after the fall in a brief section. See *Claims of Truth*, esp., 56-62.

experience among these individuals will become a consistent theme throughout our study.[146]

In general, Williams's labor serves as an excellent effort toward revising earlier scholarship's view of Puritanism as *necessarily* opposed to mysticism. Her definition of mysticism – which is never easily defined – simply reads: "an immediate experience of the Divine."[147] According to Williams, Puritan theology naturally lent itself to mystics and "mystically-inclined individuals" and thus easily "grew out of the soil of moderate Puritanism: they were not hybrid off-shoots, but expected outgrowths of mainstream Puritan theology and devotion."[148] While Puritan authors drew from past 'mystics' such as Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux, they relied primarily upon the Bible, especially in light of their Reformed reading of the Scriptures. This gave rise to a distinctive mysticism: "Thoroughly Protestant in its emphasis on predestination and the atoning death of Christ, Puritan piety was likewise mystical in its exploration of immediate and ineffable enjoyment of God. Dependent on the careful and rational study of Scripture, it also placed great emphasis on the affections, and the powerful aids of the imagination and physical senses."[149] Arising from this analysis are brilliant chapters on "Enjoyment and Ecstasy" and an extensive treatment of the Song of Songs – the biblical source that provides a sensual vocabulary for Puritans to express their intimate experiences of God.[150] Although Williams rightly highlights the neglected theme of enjoyment of God, it appears she may overcorrect the older scholarly consensus that emphasizes how Puritan reflections often demonstrate an extreme accent on sin and guilt. She provides a necessary corrective, but her views must still be understood in light of this Puritan tendency toward introspection and burden over sin – both of which Williams would surely concur are common themes throughout their writings.

The most notable contribution Williams makes for our study of Owen's anthropology derives from her placement of him within his immediate historical and theological context which highly valued spirituality. Her research also demonstrates

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[146] J. D. Williams, "The Puritan Quest for Enjoyment of God: An Analysis of the Theological and Devotional Writings of Puritans in Seventeenth Century England" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Melbourne, 1997).

[147] J. D. Williams, 17.

[148] J. D. Williams, 9.

[149] J. D. Williams, 393.

[150] See J. D. Williams, 114-28, 146-211.

how Puritan theology actively employs the idea of union with God to inform their devotional experiences;[151] in our study we will show how this idea of union manifests itself in Owen's doctrine of justification and relations with the Triune God. Owen seems to fade into the background throughout her study since she often argues for generalities within Puritan thought; therefore, our study moves beyond Williams's work by concentrating on Owen's own robust conception of the relationship between the divine and human.

Conclusion

Considering the following points confirms our appreciation for those scholars who have gone before.[152] First, Owen wrote over three hundred years ago in turbulent seventeenth century England. Bridging the gap between his context and

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[151] E.g., J. D. Williams, 65-75, 91.

[152] While numerous less significant studies could not be reviewed in this chapter, they nevertheless reflect the growing breadth of interest in Owen. These include: Roger Abbott, "John Owen and the Basis of Christian Unity," in *Out of Bondage* (London: Westminster Conference 1984, repr. 1995): 52-69; Wayne J. Baker, "Church, State, and Toleration: John Locke and Calvin's Heirs in England 1644-1689," in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994): 525-43; F. R. Entwistle, "Some Aspects of John Owen's Doctrine of the Person and Work of Christ," in *Faith and a Good Conscience* (London: Westminster Conference, 1963, repr. 1992): 47-63; Sinclair Ferguson, "John Owen on Conversion," *Banner of Truth* 186 (March 1979): 1-9; Allen Guelzo, "John Owen, Puritan Pacesetter," *Christianity Today* 20 (May 21, 1976): 14-16; Stanely Gundry, "John Owen on Authority and Scripture," in *Inerrancy and the Church*, ed. John D. Hannah (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984): 189-221; John D. Hannah, "Insights into Pastoral Counseling from John Owen," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, ed. Charles Dyer and Roy Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994): 348-60; M. Lloyd-Jones, "John Owen on Schism," in *Diversity in Unity* (London: Westminster Conference, 1963, repr. 1993): 59-80; David M. King, "The Affective Spirituality of John Owen," *EQ* 68:3 (1996): 223-33; Theodore P. Letis, "John Owen versus Brian Walton: A Reformed Response to the Birth of Textual Criticism," in *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate*, ed. Theodore P. Letis (Grand Rapids: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987); Jack N. Macloed, "John Owen and the Death of Death," in *Out of Bondage* (London: Westminster Conference, 1984, repr. 1995): 70-87; Stephen Mayor, "Teaching of John Owen Concerning the Lord's Supper," *SJT* 18 (Je 1965): 170-81; Alister E. McGrath, "Justification in Earlier Evangelicalism," *Churchman* 98:3 (1984): 217-28; Gavin McGrath, "'But we Preach Christ Crucified': The Cross of Christ in the Pastoral Theology of John Owen, 1616-1683," (St. Anthonlin's Lectureship Charity Lecture, 1994); Donald K. McKim, "John Owen's Doctrine of Scripture in Historical Perspective," *EQ* 45 (Oct.-Dec. 1973): 195-207; David J. McKinley, "John Owen's View of Illumination: An Alternative to the Fuller-Erickson Dialogue," *BS* 154 (Jan.-Mar. 1997): 93-104; Roger Nicole, "Particular Redemption," in *Our Saviour God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980); Christopher R. Smith, "'Up and be Doing': The Pragmatic Puritan Eschatology of John Owen," *EQ* 61:4 (1989): 335-49; Peter Toon, "A Message of Hope for the Rump Parliament," *EQ* 43 (1971): 82-96; idem, "The Latter-Day Glory," in *Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 1970); A. Craig Troxel, "'Cleansed Once for All': John Owen on the Glory of Gospel Worship in 'Hebrews,'" *CTJ* 32 (1997): 468-79; Carl R. Trueman, "Faith Seeking Understanding: Some Neglected Aspects of John Owen's Understanding of Scriptural Interpretation," in *Interpreting the Bible: Historical and Theological Studies in Honour of David F. Wright*, ed. A. N. S. Lane (Leicester: Apollos, 1997): 147-62.

ours requires the labors of previous scholars. Second, his *Works* fill over twenty-four densely packed volumes, writing in what has been fondly called 'Latinized English.'[153] Without the assistance of others it can be difficult to see the forest when surrounded by Owen's many trees. Third, Puritan theological studies are controversial by their very nature. When one cannot find a common consensus regarding the name 'Puritan,' how could one ever hope for congenial agreement regarding the particularities of past theological conceptions? Such debates confused and divided people 350 years ago and there is no future end in sight to these lively misunderstandings. Finally, the ever-present reality that everyone (yes, even the scholar) suffers from limited time and a finite mind cannot be ignored. This reality ought to liberate rather than frustrate, for it allows us to dialogue with – and sometimes challenge – the work of others who have wrestled with similar questions. It is our contention that without this dialogue, our development of Owen's thought would be severely stunted.

As a result of the survey of this scholarship we discover that there is a significant need for a full exploration of Owen's anthropology as understood in terms of relationship. In other words, we will see that for Owen, being human is fundamentally about being in relationship with God. As we see at the very end of our study, being made in God's image is primarily about loving Jesus Christ who is the mediator between God and humanity. This relationship is ultimately what defines being in communion with God.

Our study follows the logic of Owen's thought on renewed relations with God. We begin the next chapter by exploring humanity as made in the image of God. Here we will focus on Owen's employment of what is commonly called faculty psychology, for this provides the grammar for his ability to describe relations. Chapter two ends with a brief survey of humanity through history, providing a necessary framework for seeing how creation, fall, and redemption fit into Owen's conception of relations between God and humanity. In chapter three our attention turns from humanity in general, to the God-man Jesus Christ in specific. Questions explored here include: why the incarnation? how does the humiliation of the Son comfort struggling believers? Are there continuities and discontinuities between

[153] J. I. Packer muses: "Owen's style is often stigmatised as cumbersome and tortuous. Actually it is a Latinized spoken style, fluent but stately and expansive, in the elaborate Ciceronian

Christ's humanity and fallen humanity? Having considered the incarnation, our study next moves to the question of justification. Special attention will be given to Owen's anthroposensitive approach. We cover his understanding of faith, some important disagreements he has with his Roman Catholic opponents, and how he understands negative and positive imputation. Chapter five takes us to the core of our study: human communion with the Triune God. Here we discover Owen's creative attempt to view the Trinity – usually considered one of the most abstract doctrines – within the context of worship. Owen describes in detail the Father's love, the Son's grace, and the Spirit's consolation. Finally, we conclude our study by looking at the Lord's day and Lord's Supper. In these two examples we find Owen pointing toward signs, the experience of which fosters the human interface with God as realized in Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of the day and Lord of the Supper. Throughout the entire study we will observe Owen's consistent movement between theology and anthropology, made possible and based in his Christology.

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manner," 194.

Chapter 2

Created to Commune with God
Owen's Formulation of the *Imago Dei*

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.
MARK 12:30

Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy him for ever.
WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM (1648)

The approaching unto God in his service is the chief exaltation of our nature above the beasts that perish.
JOHN OWEN (1645)[1]

Introduction

Having reviewed the growing literature on John Owen, we may now turn our attention to this Puritan's view of relations between God and humanity. Given the anthropological concerns underlying our study, it is appropriate to begin with Owen's formulation of the *imago Dei*. Through this investigation the reader should become aware of many of the core issues informing Owen's view of humanity, laying the groundwork upon which the rest of the study builds. Since considerable attention is paid to Owen's use of faculty psychology, we will highlight some of the similarities and dissimilarities between Owen's Christian conception and Aristotle's influential ideas throughout this chapter. This is done since the influence of Aristotle on Owen's thought remains a subject of much interest and debate.[2] However, our discussion

[1] "The Greater Catechism," *Works*, 1: 474.

[2] James B. Torrance, "The Incarnation and 'Limited Atonement'," 33, 37, and Clifford, *Atonement*, 96, 98, 104, both argue that Owen's understanding of the atonement is negatively influenced by his Aristotelian presuppositions. On the other hand, Carl R. Trueman, "John Owen's Dissertation on Divine Justice: An Exercise in Christocentric Scholasticism," *CTJ* 33 (1998): 103; idem, *The Claims of Truth*, 38, 43, 227-40, Bobick, 95-120, and Rehnman, 56, 141, while not denying

aims to go beyond a simple comparison of two thinkers, instead focusing on Owen's own theological maneuvering.

In this chapter we will therefore first describe Owen's distinctions and terminology regarding the *imago*. Second, we will briefly highlight how he perceives Christ as the perfect image, although this will be more fully dealt with in chapter three. Following this we will move to our third and primary concern. It will be argued that one cannot fully appreciate Owen's understanding of the *imago* without taking into account his conception or at least language of faculty psychology, and it is here that the discussion of Aristotle becomes most relevant. Fourth, we will see that certain events in history have cosmic results concerning the *imago*: the creation, fall, regeneration, sanctification, and glorification of man. Only when faculty psychology and man's struggle with righteousness are taken together can one fully understand Owen's position. These topics introduce Owen's anthropology as an early modern attempt to present a holistic conception of humanity as image bearers who were created to commune with the Creator. Because this chapter deals with themes so prevalent throughout Owen's writings, we shall concentrate upon his classic works, *ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ*,[3] *ΧΡΙΣΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ*, and *The Glory of Christ*.[4] Looking at these particular treatises, both in this chapter and in the following one, highlights the connection Owen consistently makes between Christology, anthropology, and pneumatology.

Distinctions and Terminology

As a well-read theologian, Owen was aware of many of the theological debates that surrounded the doctrine of the *imago Dei*.[5] He follows the tendency of

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the Aristotelian influence on Owen, nevertheless want to limit the speculations regarding its overall impact on the Puritan's theology.

[3] This treatise of over 650 pages is found in volume 3 of Owen's *Works*. Goold, making an editorial decision based upon Owen's own words, considers volumes 3 and 4 under the general heading, *ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ: A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, even though the five treatises in volume 4 were written at different times, and each published later than volume 3.

[4] For *ΧΡΙΣΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ* see *Works*, 1: 1-272, and *The Glory of Christ*, *Works*, 1: 273-415, 419-61. These treatises, the first published in 1679 and the second in 1684, represent Owen's mature thought, as he dies in 1683.

[5] Owen's personal library shows that he had all of the major texts (e.g., Irenaeus, Athanasius) that discussed this particular issue, and he constantly interacts with them in his more academic works.

some early Church Fathers in making a distinction between "image" and "likeness."[6] Owen does not view them simply as synonyms, but rather as complementary ideas. Whereas Irenaeus and others often make this distinction communicate different attributes of man (e.g., reason and free will distinguished from some supernatural endowment of the Spirit),[7] Owen views them more in terms of righteousness. Original righteousness is shorthand for right relations between God and humanity before the fall. Created good and upright, with all of their faculties working correctly, Adam and Eve were righteous insofar as they were created to relate to their God and respond to him in obedience.[8] In this sense, to lose this righteousness is to lose the image.

However, Owen qualifies his assertion that the image is lost in fallen humanity. One can retain the marks of the image of the Divine while behaving in an unrighteous manner that is completely unlike the Creator. In an analogy of parents and their children, Owen claims that "though all children do partake of the nature of their parents, yet they may be, and some of them are, very deformed, and bear very little likeness."[9] He goes on to explain that such a deformity summarizes all of humanity. Humans "have the image of God in [their] hearts, and yet come short of that likeness unto him, in its degrees and improvement."[10] Therefore, "though the image of God may be in us, there is not much of his likeness upon us" even though the Christian profession and fundamental duty is to grow in this resemblance of God.[11]

The listing of Owen's library comes from the *Biblioteca Oweniana sive Catalogus Librorum*, London, 1684.

[6] Cf. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 9, *NPNF2* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1899, repr. 1994), 2.12: "For the phrase 'after His image' clearly refers to the side of his nature which consists of mind and free will, whereas 'after His likeness' means likeness in virtue so far as that is possible."

[7] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* , rev. (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 171. See also Karl Barth, *CD* 3: 1, 192-3; James Barr, "The Image of God in the Book of Genesis – A Study in Terminology," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 51 (1968-69): 11-26.

[8] E.g., *Works*, 12: 157-58; 10: 80; 22: 158. Arguing against what he perceives as Arminius' innovations, Owen declares: "Hitherto we have thought that the original righteousness wherein Adam was created had comprehended the integrity and perfection of the whole man; not only that whereby the body was obedient unto the soul, and all the affections subservient to the rule of reason for the performance of all natural actions, but also a light, uprightness, and holiness of grace in the mind and will, whereby he was enabled to yield obedience unto God for the attaining of that supernatural end whereunto he was created," *Works*, 10: 84.

[9] *Works*, 3: 578-9.

[10] *Works*, 3: 579.

[11] *Works*, 3: 579.

This distinction between image and likeness raises a question: was the image destroyed by the fall? As with Calvin, Owen makes it difficult to answer this question definitively. Controversy has abounded as to whether Calvin believed that the *imago* was destroyed at the fall. The reason why this is such a difficult question is related to Calvin's vocabulary. He uses such phrases as "wiped out" (*Comm. on Ephesians* 4:24), "destroyed" (*Comm. on Gen.* 1:26), and "canceled" (*Comm. on II Corinthians* 3:18). Consequently Calvin seems to present a case for the end of the *imago* in humanity after the fall. Susan Schreiner, arguing for a more balanced view of Calvin, claims that "the fall, which was a 'confusion' of the natural order, effected a corresponding confusion in the order of knowing. Human beings no longer refer their excellence to God and consequently can no longer perceive God in nature. In short, the *relational character* of the *imago Dei* was destroyed."[12] Depending on how one defines the *imago* dictates what conclusion one will arrive at, and this will be seen to apply not only to Calvin, but to Owen as well. If the image is purely relational, then yes, Calvin argues that it is destroyed as a result of the fall. If it is more than that – including different natural capacities – than Calvin argues that the *imago* remains but is severely marred. The tension within this view is that human faculties, for Calvin and Owen after him, are often viewed as the means through which relationship is possible. When the faculties are not working properly, the possibility for unhindered fellowship with God suffers.[13]

Like that of his contemporaries Owen's language may lend itself to the interpretation that he considers the image utterly lost after the fall. For this reason it is understandable why some puritan preachers, less concerned with systematics, conclude without qualification that the image is completely destroyed. The Calvinist Scotsman Thomas Boston (1676-1732) provides such an example. In his sermons and writings one encounters a pastor who clearly and consistently believes that the image was utterly annihilated with the fall. This pushes Boston "in the direction of seeing the natural man as something less than fully human."[14] While attempting to avoid this

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[12] *The Theater of his Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1991), 66-67. Emphasis mine. Cf. Muller, *PRRD* 1: 186.

[13] The question of physical handicaps and limitations is a different one, since the concern here for these thinkers is about whether or not one's faculties, no matter how limited, are directed toward God or toward self.

[14] Philip Graham Ryken, *Thomas Boston as Preacher of the Fourfold State*, ed. David F. Wright and Donald Macleod, *Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology* (Edinburgh: Rutherford

conclusion, Owen often sounds similar to Boston. Owen affirms continuity between the first man and his progeny while at the same time asserting the relational devastation caused by the fall.

A few examples from Owen's writings, however, reveal the difficulty his interpreters have encountered at this point. The Oxford divine complains that few people consider the depravity "of their natures, that vileness which is come upon them by the loss of the image of God."[15] Elsewhere he makes a distinction between sinful man and the Messiah who enjoys the fullness of grace: the image is "lost from our nature," impossible for people to comprehend, at least "until it was renewed and exemplified in the human nature of Christ."[16] Here the direct connection between Christology and anthropology is obvious. Finally, Owen makes the strong claim that with the loss of the image, humanity began to represent Satan rather than God.[17] In these examples, Owen's language points to the conclusion that humanity no longer bears the image after the fall.

However, in other places where Owen discusses the image of God, his comments reveal that he believes the image remains even after the fall. In discussing Christ's role as Prophet, Priest, and King, Owen notes that "the image of God in us was *defaced* by sin. The renovation or restoration hereof was one principle design of Christ in his coming."[18] This language communicates the imagery of ruin, but not utter destruction. Sin appears to have shattered the once reflective mirror; the mirror remains, it is just in pieces instead of a perfect whole. Furthermore, Owen discusses the entrance of sin and how it was humanity's righteousness that was defaced and lost. He then explains that this righteousness "did not depart from any one power, part, or faculty of our souls, but from our whole nature." Owen goes on to describe how a "corruption . . . ensued on our minds, wills, and affections, upon the loss of the image of God."[19] To borrow more Greek philosophical language, human faculties remain, although they do not function as originally designed.

House, 1999), 143. Ryken goes on to accurately contrast Boston's views with Owen's more nuanced position. For a recent reprint of Boston's most important work, see Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, orig. 1720 rep. 1997).

[15] *Works*, 3: 450. Cf. with 451, where he likewise declares that one should search the Bible to understand "the condition of our nature after the loss of the image of God."

[16] *Works*, 1: 171-72.

[17] *Works*, 1: 184.

[18] *Works*, 3: 629. Emphasis mine.

[19] *Works*, 3: 418.

Although it is clear that Owen believes the unblemished image is lost, it is equally clear that he believes its vestiges remain.

> By the loss of the image of God, our nature lost its pre-eminence, and we were reduced into order amongst perishing beasts; for notwithstanding some *feeble relics of this image yet abiding with us*, we have really, with respect unto our proper end, in our lapsed condition, *more* of the bestial nature in us than of the divine. Wherefore, the restoration of this image in us by the grace of Jesus Christ. . . is the recovery of that pre-eminence and privilege of our nature which we had foolishly lost.[20]

What did Owen mean by this "loss of the image"? Certainly he acknowledged catastrophic consequences that resulted from sin's entrance into the garden,[21] but he also acknowledged the "feeble relics" of God's image in humans. Yet this image must be seen in the context of relations with God.[22] By acknowledging this tension in Owen's wording one may best conclude that Owen is referring to degrees along a continuum rather than simply offering the two extremes – the image perfectly remains *or* it is utterly destroyed – as the only possible conclusions. Although sin brought chaos, disorder, and rebellion, in some respect the defaced *imago* remains. Looking at a comment from Owen's massive treatise on *The Saint's Perseverance* demonstrates Owen's understanding. Discussing people who do not experience the indwelling of the Spirit he writes: "Their minds remain; though depraved, destroyed, perverted. . . yet the faculty remains still."[23] In this example we see that somehow he finds it acceptable to talk about the mind as both destroyed and yet still remaining, and in maintaining this tension he follows many of his Reformed predecessors.

A brief summary of how Owen uses the language of image and likeness will help solidify this fundamental distinction in his anthropology. Likeness communicates righteousness in Owen's view. As a result of the fall, humanity becomes sinful and completely *unlike* God. However, the image remains because it is this aspect that allows for the relationship between the divine and human. Sin affected human righteousness and the ability to respond to God. Owen freely speaks of the image's "loss" because a person's natural ability to worship his Creator has

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[20] *Works*, 3: 580. Emphasis mine.

[21] "Hereby we lost the image of God," which means that we "lost ourselves and our souls," *Works*, 1: 208.

[22] For the Christian, "to be nigh unto God, and to be like unto him, are the same. To be always with him, and perfectly like him, *according to the capacity of our nature*, is to be eternally blessed. To live by faith in the contemplation of the glory of God in Christ, is that initiation into both, whereof we are capable in this world." *Works*, 1: 52. Emphasis mine.

[23] *Works*, 11: 343.

gone, while the faculties which allowed for the original communion to occur between God and humanity remain. As we will see later, by retaining the faculties that make relations possible, some element of ontological continuity between pre-fall and fallen humanity is preserved. These faculties are vital because they allow relations, but since the fall humanity's faculties are no longer oriented toward God.[24] In this way, vestiges of the image remain (i.e., humans retain their faculties), yet the likeness is destroyed in that human persons were designed relationally, and this was disrupted as humanity turned from God to themselves.[25]

After the fall the shattered image must find renewal from another source, a second Adam. Owen approvingly quotes Ambrose's answer to humanity's dilemma: "The image of God, that is, the Word of God, came unto him who was after the image of God, that is man. And this image of God seeks him who was after the image of God, that he might seal him with it again, and confirm him, because thou hadst lost that which thou hadst received."[26] Those who downplay the devastation caused by the fall inevitably present an "undervaluation of the love and grace of Jesus Christ."[27] Sin destroyed good and right relations between Humanity and the Creator, and thus the incarnation was essential to human renewal. Christ, therefore, as the perfect image of God came to restore the lost relations, and in so doing provided the way to everlasting communion between God and humanity.

Christ's Role as the Image of God

According to Owen, the Christian ought to look to God in order to understand himself, the world, and his Creator.[28] The contemplative person must then ask to whom or what do I look to see God most clearly? Owen focuses his answer upon Christ. In the preface to Owen's *ΧΡΙΣΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ*, he writes that Christ,

> In his divine person, as he was the only-begotten of the Father from eternity, he is the essential image of the Father, by the generation of his person, and the communication of the divine nature unto him therein. As he is incarnate,

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[24] See *Works*, 19: 387.

[25] Cf. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G.T. Thomson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1978), 313.

[26] *Works*, 1: 26: "Imago [id est, Verbum Dei,] ad eum qui est ad imaginem, [hoc est, hominem,] venit, et quærit imago eum qui est ad similitudinem sui, ut iterum signet, ut iterum confirmet, quia amiseras quod accepisti." From Ambrose, *Expositio Psalmi Cxviii.*

[27] *Works*, 19: 347.

[28] *Works*, 2: 80 ff.

> he is both in his own entire person God and man, and in the administration of his office, the image or representative of the nature and will of God unto us.[29]

Later he quotes from numerous early Church Fathers to show that Christ uniquely represents the image of the Father. For example, he notes Eusebius' conclusion that since Jesus was begotten of the Father, he alone could perfectly bear the divine image. Christ alone "bears in himself the image of the ineffable and inconceivable Deity. Wherefore, he both is, and is called God, because of his being the character, similitude, or image of him who is the first."[30] In Owen's analysis of scripture, he argues that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, the second Adam, and therefore he is the unblemished image to which the rest of humanity must look for restoration.[31] In the next chapter we will explore in far more detail Owen's conception of the humanity of Christ.

Basing much of his argument upon Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 1:15, 17-18; 3:10, Owen reinforces his claim that Christ must be considered the perfect image of God.[32] The result of this Christocentric emphasis influences how Owen understands all of humanity. When facing the difficulty of formulating the makeup of the *imago*, the theologian cannot exclusively study the first Adam. Following Greek thought many previous Christian writers developed their understanding of the *imago* by comparing Adam with the animals.[33] In this they proved to be similar to ancient Greek philosophers like Aristotle with his hierarchy of souls. Whatever was unique to Adam was declared the substance of the *image*. This often led theologians to posit that reason encapsulated man's uniqueness, as Aristotle's rational soul was distinguished from the vegetative and sensitive lower souls.[34] Owen, however, following the lead of other more Christologically minded theologians, moves beyond this limited analysis by focusing upon Christ.

For example, Owen notes that God sent "his own Son to take our nature on him, and therein to represent unto us the perfect idea of that holiness and obedience

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[29] *Works*, 1: 18.

[30] *Works*, 1: 19. From Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica,* IV. 2, translated by William Ferrar as *The Proof of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1981).

[31] Cf. *Works*, 2: 163-164; 5: 323 ff.; 10: 391 ff.

[32] E.g., *Works*, 3: 478, 515, 573.

[33] David Cairns, *The Image of God in Man* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 112.

[34] Aristotle, "De Anima (on the Soul)," in *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, *The Modern Library* (New York: Random House, 1947), 414 a – 15 a.

which he requireth of us."[35] The above comment is taken from a section that describes how Christ is the moral example for believers. Before the incarnation, believers could only look to types and shadows to reveal the glory of God. After the incarnation, the glory and image of God manifested itself definitively. "Faith doth now clearly and distinctly view and consider Jesus Christ as he is represented unto us in the glass of the gospel; that is, the evidences of the presence of God in him and with him, in his work, purity, and holiness."[36] Looking to Christ is not an abstract concept for Puritan theologians, but rather the only way a person can view the unblemished image of God.[37] While there are similarities here to Aristotle's attempt to find what is universal and unique in man through observation of the particulars, thus enabling one to distinguish between what is essential and accidental to humans, there is also a significant difference.[38] Owen looks not to random men haphazardly chosen as samples, but to the *Man* – Jesus Christ.

Only by being in Christ, who is the reconciler, may fallen humanity begin to resemble the image of God, for Christ is the one who brings God and humanity together.[39] By assuming a true human nature with all the various faculties, Christ as the God-man is uniquely able to restore the broken communion between God and his creation. The *image* restoration comes through the restoration of a *relationship* through Christ, the true image. Again we will see this in more detail in chapters three and four. For now we may simply note an observation Owen makes. Scripture records how the Spirit brought constant aid and help to the incarnate Lord. The great difference between Jesus' humanity and that of every other human being after the fall, a topic we will deal with in the next chapter, comes from the virgin birth. Because the Holy Spirit formed the body of Jesus from his inception, the person of Christ was "pure," in fact "there was no disposition or tendency in his constitution to the least

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[35] *Works*, 3: 511.

[36] *Works*, 3: 512.

[37] Cf. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968): 105: "In man the true basis for an image is found, but not a perfect one, for that is only in the son of God, Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3. Yet the imperfection is the result not of deprival but of denial."

[38] Cf. Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre: A History of Philosophy*, 5 ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993), 84-91.

[39] E.g., *Works*, 1: 16; 8: 22. Most vividly in *Works*, 22: 25: "This was one principal end of the birth, life, death, and exaltation of Christ. His work in all these was to make peace and reconciliation between God and man. Hereunto belongeth the slaying, destruction, or removal of the enmity that was between them."

deviation from perfect holiness in any kind."[40] Yet the Spirit's work in the life of Jesus does not end at the miraculous conception, but continues throughout his earthly life. If Christ is the one to whom believers must look, then just as the Holy Spirit supernaturally worked in Jesus' life, securing his entire sanctification, so will the Spirit of Christ work in believers' lives.[41] Owen consistently emphasizes the relationship between Christ, the Spirit, and the believer. Christ is the perfect image while the Spirit functions as the one who is "communicating his grace, image, and likeness to the elect."[42] In other words, the "source of [Christ and the believer's] sanctification is common, the image we bear is common, thus we are brethren."[43] Again, relationship is the focus. Exploration of this union with Christ is another theme we develop at greater length in the following chapters.

Christ provides the framework for understanding the *imago Dei*; he is the foundation, hope, and motive for every believer to seek restoration into the image.[44] The connection between the believer and Christ as the image is central to Owen's language of describing the believer "in" Christ. We will discuss the privileges associated with union with Christ in chapter four. According to Owen, a believer's union with Christ provides him not only benefits, but also tremendous responsibility. Renewal in the image of God only comes through identification with Christ as applied by the power of the Holy Spirit. Once "in" Christ, the believer is now "a representation of him to the world."[45] The Christian acts as the physical representation of the incarnate Christ. Because each believer has this role, each must strive after holiness – the only way one can properly represent Christ. Having said that, true holiness is ultimately about one's relations with God, and this brings us back to Owen's underlying structure of the faculties and their importance for right relations.[46] The faculties are the ordained means for humanity to enjoy fellowship with God.

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[40] *Works*, 3: 167.

[41] See *Works*, 3: 159-188, where Owen describes at length the role of the Spirit in the life of Christ.

[42] *Works*, 3: 62.

[43] Spence, "Christ's Humanity and Ours," 85.

[44] Cf. *Works*, 3: 570.

[45] *Works*, 3: 589. .

Human Faculties as Means to Relationship with God

Throughout Owen's writings the reader discovers a theologian attempting to take seriously the whole person. One of the ways he seeks to achieve this is through the application of a basic Aristotelian psychology. Owen is quick to use these ideas when helpful, but also to modify and build upon them in order to represent fairly (in his mind) the biblical account.

It must also be noted from the start that 'faculty psychology', though having its classic expression primarily in Aristotle, came to Owen in many forms.[47] Charles L. Cohen's masterful work, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience* provides arguably the best introduction to what he labels 'Faculty-humor psychology.'[48] His research covers roughly the period from the reign of Elizabeth to the early 1640's. In an effort to avoid recreating Cohen's labors our focus remains primarily upon Owen, with occasional references to Aristotle for comparison's sake: Cohen's study neither reaches back into Aristotle's writings, which were popular among Protestant scholastics, nor does it extend to Owen's teaching. While the common source for many of these ideas is found in Greek philosophy, theologians throughout Church history had already Christianized this understanding of human psychology well before Owen penned a word.[49] This seventeenth century Oxford theologian falls within this rich tradition.

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[46] *Works*, 13: 423-24

[47] Note that one does find a rudimentary but similar psychology even in Plato, but Aristotle remains the most influential philosopher in this respect. For helpful background see Frederick Copleston, *Greece and Rome*, vol. 1, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Image Books, 1985), 207-11, 266-378; Sir David Ross, *Aristotle*, 5 ed. ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 135-57, 195-239; T. H. Irwin, "The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle's Ethics," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: UCP, 1980): 35-53.

[48] Cohen, (New York: OUP, 1986), esp. 25-46. See also Norman Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard* (Chapel Hill: UNCP, 1981), 106, 148; J. Rodney Fulcher, "Puritans and the Passions: The Faculty Psychology in American Puritanism," *JHBS*, 9 (1973), 123-39; James G. Blight, "Solomon Stoddard's *Safety of Appearing* and the Dissolution of the Puritan Faculty Psychology," *JHBS*, 10 (1974), 238-50; Ruth L. Anderson, *Elizabethan Psychology and Shakespeare's Plays*, University of Iowa Humanistic Studies, 3 (Iowa City, 1927); Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: HUP, 1939), 230-79.

[49] Muller, *PRRD* 1: 227-228 rightly notes that the Protestant scholastics adopted "without question the entire language of faculty psychology as one of the presuppositions of their discussions of human knowing."

Owen often uses the word "universal" as shorthand for the compilation of a person's various faculties.[50] For example, in his *Greater Catechism* he asks his catechumens what holiness is required, to which he provides the answer: "That *universal*, sincere obedience to the whole will of God, *in our hearts, minds, wills, and actions*, whereby we are in some measure made conformable to Christ, our head."[51] Here the expression is used to describe what unifies the individual. Each of the faculties has a distinct role in enabling a person to honor God with his entire or universal being. Although Owen employs the language of 'faculty' to refer to various human capacities (e.g., faith),[52] three seem to encapsulate his traditional faculty psychology: the mind, will, and affections. Taken together these represent the natural capacities of the *imago*.[53] It is our contention that Owen maintains this classic formula in order to express how humanity was originally made to commune with God. Thus, when the relationship is ruptured the faculties become entangled, and when the relationship is renewed, the faculties are positively affected. Discussing the various faculties and tracing the image through redemptive history will provide an opportunity to see this in more detail.

The Importance of the Mind

While it is true that Owen placed a great deal of emphasis upon each of the faculties that constitute the image, none receives more attention than the "mind." Playing a central role in "ruling" man, the mind allows him to function properly.[54] The mind "is that in us which looketh out after proper objects for the will and affections to receive and embrace."[55] It has supremacy over the other faculties, not necessarily in importance but surely in its role: "Light is received by the mind, applied by the understanding, used by the heart."[56] At its core, this is an example of

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[50] E.g., *Works*, 1: 178; 2: 101, 182, 265 f.; 3: 471, 509; 6: 604 f.; 7: 420.

[51] *Works*, 1: 488. *GC* 20.5. Emphasis mine.

[52] E.g., *Works*, 9: 20; 20: 150-151, which connect faith with the faculties, but does not seem to consider faith itself a faculty. See also *Works*, 7: 31, where even the stomach is considered a faculty.

[53] Cf. T. F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), 39. Among other things Torrance cites the *Brief Confession of Faith*: "I confess that man was created in the image of God, i.e., endued with full integrity of spirit, will, and all parts of the soul, faculties and senses."

[54] Cf. Owen, *Oxford Orations*, 12-13.

[55] *Works*, 3: 250.

[56] *Works*, 3: 252.

Christianized Aristotelian epistemology.[57] The mind is the receptacle for images presented to it, using the other faculties to bring movement. Without each faculty working properly, and the mind coordinating them all, man becomes dysfunctional.

Impotency of the mind is the result of the fall.[58] Owen claims that the "leading, conducting faculty of the soul is the mind or understanding. Now, this is corrupted and vitiated by the fall."[59] Humanity faces the consequences of the fall, but the believer's mind has opportunities to worship God in ways that are unavailable to the unbeliever. All who live outside the renewing work of the Spirit live in this corrupted state of mind. The mind cannot "receive spiritual things" because of its distorted orientation.[60] Original sin left man's mind "filled with prejudices against the mystery of the gospel manner."[61] On its own, the mind will always reject the goodness and renewal of faith. Here again the supremacy of the mind is emphasized; when the mind is not working properly the entire person becomes disoriented. Owen makes two lengthy statements regarding the mind that clearly indicate this and further demonstrate Owen's presupposition of the accuracy of Aristotelian psychological ordering:

> (1) That nothing in the soul, nor the will and affections, can will, desire, or cleave unto any good, but what is presented unto them by the mind, as it is presented. . . .
>
> (2) As the soul can no way, by any other of its faculties, receive, embrace, or adhere unto that good in a saving manner which the mind doth not savingly apprehend; so where the mind is practically deceived, or any way captivated under the power of prejudices, the will and the affections can no way free themselves from entertaining that evil which the mind hath perversely assented unto.[62]

The other faculties depend upon the mind to insure good for the whole person. Once the mind goes astray, the other faculties inevitably turn from God and toward further degeneration. While Aristotle argues that this occurs primarily by not developing right habits through education and practice, Owen believes that all

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[57] Cf. Aristotle, *DA*, Bk. III, iv-v; Copleston, *Greece and Rome*, 328-31; Muller, *PRRD* 1: 227.

[58] *Works*, 3: 266. Cf. Muller, *PRRD* 1: 72 who notes that "whereas the medieval doctors had assumed that the fall affected primarily the will and its affections and not the reason, the Reformers assumed also the fallenness of the rational faculty: natural theology, according to the Reformers, was not merely limited to nonsaving knowledge of God – it was also bound in idolatry."

[59] *Works*, 3: 330

[60] *Works*, 3: 267.

[61] *Works*, 3: 277.

postlapsarian humanity suffers the consequences of a corrupted mind from birth to grave.[63] Yet for both thinkers, the mind is central in allowing or disallowing the human to live rightly. Once the mind is 'off-track,' the individual will live less and less rationally and thus less and less humanly. Focusing the mind on its proper end is all-important for both men; all efforts at moral improvement without the right object in mind will be like arrows shot haphazardly into the air, completely missing the target.[64] Owen may disagree with Aristotle about *what* the end is, but he does not disagree that directing the mind toward a proper end is crucial.

According to Owen, Christians have the joy and responsibility of renewing their minds through relations with God. With regeneration, the Spirit works to transform a person's mind, eventually renovating his entire being. This is the process of the Spirit's "saving illumination" in the mind that reorients man's disposition.[65] Now the redeemed individual may look to the end for which he was created, namely to worship and enjoy his God. This privilege of image renewal also carries consequences: "it is [the Christian's] duty to endeavour the improvement and enlargement of the light they have, in the daily exercise of the spiritual power they have received."[66] In this transformation of the mind, one seeks to renew the image and prepare for eternal communion with God. Owen argues that "Our minds by [love] will be changed into the image of what we contemplate, and we shall endeavour that our lives be conformed thereunto."[67] One must therefore turn his mind to Christ, so that through contemplation one will slowly become like Christ,

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[62] *Works*, 3: 281.

[63] Aristotle would say that people carry out improper actions because of irrationality rather than some inherited moral corruption. This is why he encourages raising a child in such a way that a proper 'habit' is formed. Here Aristotle uses the Greek *hexis*, which is later translated into Latin as *habitus* and used extensively by the scholastics. Habits are crucial in forming our ability for virtuous actions, because we become virtuous through actions, and thus through habits. This extends not simply to actions, but to feelings and 'appetites.' A person's actions give rise to states of character, and these states of character will either enable or prohibit true virtue. Therefore, training of youth becomes all important: "It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather *all* the difference," Aristotle, "Ethica Nicomachea (Nicomachean Ethics)," in *Introduction to Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, *The Modern Library* (New York: Random House, 1947), 1103 b 24-25. Cf. 1104 b 9-14. Originally the child practices certain actions out of reverence and respect for his parents. Later in his life he will learn, not simply to act rightly, but to do the act from right motives for the action itself rather than for lesser reasons. See Susan Sauvé Meyer, "Responsibility for Character: Its Scope and Significance," *Aristotle on Moral Responsibility: Character and Cause* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993): 122-148.

[64] Cf. Aristotle, *EN* 1094 a 17-24.

[65] *Works*, 3: 493.

[66] *Works*, 3: 494.

[67] *Works*, 3: 585.

who is the perfect image of God. Obviously the life and Passion of Christ serve as the best examples of love.[68] Following a long theological tradition, Owen employs this insight to help believers grow closer to God.[69] Whereas Aristotle strongly encouraged contemplation of truth as vital in his view of the happy life, Owen's object of contemplation was not philosophical truth, but *Him* who is Truth.[70] Owen saw the object of contemplation as a person rather than an abstraction.

The Role of the Will

Before one can discuss the faculty of the will, a brief word about the fluidity of Owen's language is necessary. In his discussions of the faculties, Owen focuses less upon fixed distinctions, and more upon the broader concepts communicated. Overlap between the discussions of the various faculties is common. Some confusion regarding Owen's words may be avoided by keeping this overlap in mind.

Owen believes that one may conceptualize the will in two ways. "First, As a rational, vital faculty of our souls; secondly, As a free principle, freedom being of its essence or nature."[71] A strong correlation exists between a person's will and his actions – between one's (in)ability to do certain things, and how these manifestations reveal one's disposition. Once regenerated, a new power enters the human enabling renewal of the image: it "consists in its liberty, freedom, and ability to consent unto, choose, and embrace, spiritual things. Believers have free will unto that which is spiritually good; for they are freed from that bondage and slavery unto sin which they were under in the state of nature."[72] Here Owen follows Augustine's framework. Before the fall, man lived in a state of *posse non peccare*. After the fall natural man

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[68] *Works*, 3: 564.

[69] Cf. Simon K. H. Chan, "The Puritan Meditative Tradition, 1599-1691: A Study of Ascetical Piety" (Ph.D., diss., Cambridge, 1986), believes that Owen does at points present a "view of meditation which departs significantly from the orthodox position," 6, 204-15.

[70] Cf. *EN* 1177 a 14-24. See our discussion in chapter 3 on the 'object of faith.'

[71] *Works*, 3: 334.

[72] *Works*, 3: 494. Owen elsewhere shows the relationship between the Spirit and a person's will. He argues that the Spirit in regeneration "offers no violence or compulsions unto the will. This faculty is not naturally capable to give admission unto. If it be compelled, it is destroyed. And the mention that is made in the Scripture of compelling ('Compel them to come in') respects the certainty of the event, not the manner of the operation on them. But whereas the will, in the depraved condition of fallen nature, is not only habitually filled and possessed with an aversion from that which is good spiritually. . . but also continually acts an opposition unto it, as being under the power of the 'carnal mind,' which is 'enmity against God.'" *Works*, 3: 319.

lives in the state of *non posse non peccare.*[73] According to Owen, once regeneration occurs a renewal of man's will takes place and his ability to respond to God and honor him becomes a reality.[74] That is, each believer returns to *posse non peccare.*

The disposition of each believer changes when "grace and holiness" are "infused" into the elect (cf. *habitus infusus*).[75] Consequently, "the will is freed, enlarged, and enabled to answer the commands of God for obedience, according to the tenor of the new covenant. This is that freedom, this is that power of the will, which the Scripture reveals and regards and which by all the promises and precepts of it we are obliged to use and exercise, and no other."[76] Given this understanding, Owen grounds a person's moral actions in the will, rather than the intellect. At this point Owen shows the influence of Aristotle more openly than usual. He begins by quoting 'the Philosopher' and then building upon him: "As Aristotle says, 'Virtue is a habit which maketh him that hath it good or virtuous, and his actions good.' Now all moral habits are seated in the will. Intellectual habits are not immediately effective of good or evil, but as the will is influenced by them. These habits do incline, dispose, and enable the will to act according to their nature."[77] The mind influences the will, but the will acts upon the information. Given a person's fallen nature and ungodly *habitus*, the will inevitably moves toward inadequate ends instead of the ultimate end in Jesus Christ. Unlike some ancient philosophers, Owen believes that moral education is not enough.[78] A supernatural change in the person is necessary, and this always takes him back to the primacy of the Holy Spirit's action.[79] Owen's conception of the will is complex in that he thinks two aspects must come under

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[73] Cf. *Works*, 3: 494-95.

[74] Owen maintains that even in this state of regeneration, the believer still relies upon the Spirit's activity to make his actions righteous and pleasing to God. Here one sees Owen's strong synergistic emphasis in the process of sanctification. See *Works*, 3: 535, 536, 433.

[75] Cf. *Works*, 2: 200, 206; 3: 220; 4: 437; 5: 64; 11: 97-8; 21: 599-600. See Muller, *DLGTT*, 134.

[76] *Works*, 3: 496.

[77] *Works*, 3: 502-503. Cf. *EN* 1103 a 14-25.

[78] Rejecting the Socratic idea that people do wrong out of ignorance, Aristotle also thinks the process is more complex. "The saying that 'no one is voluntarily wicked nor involuntarily happy' seems to be partly false and partly true; for no one is involuntarily happy, but wickedness is voluntary," *EN* 1113 b 14-16. Cf. *EN* 1114 b 1-9. He argues that there can be two senses of knowledge, one having it, the other using it, *EN* 1147 a 10-12. A person can know about something (i.e., the right thing to do), and yet not use that knowledge (i.e., act wrongly, though not ignorantly). But for Aristotle, this is to act irrationally.

[79] See *Works*, 3: 244-82; 11: 94-95.

consideration: the action and the "end for which it is done."[80] An action may be good and result in the glory of God in Christ only by God's grace through the Spirit's movement.

In accordance with these external and internal guidelines, Owen maintains a consistent emphasis upon the image of God in man as a whole, rather than simply the actions man performs. Owen's system moves beyond public "righteousness" and into private motivations. The renewal of the image changes both the actions and the reasons for performing them. Without this transformation, a person remains in his "natural state" – a state in which he cannot hope for eternal communion with God.

The Struggle with the Affections

Owen's emphasis upon the affections as part of the image is particularly interesting in light of his endeavor to recapture a theological justification for the prominent role of affections in defining what it means to be a human being.[81]

There is a clear coherence between experience and the affections in Owen's work. It is this aspect of Owen's treatise on the Holy Spirit that captured the attention of Geoffrey F. Nuttall. When beginning his treatise, Owen acknowledges that none before him have so fully discussed the "whole economy" of the Holy Spirit.[82] Nuttall argues that "what justifies Owen in his claim to be among the pioneers, is the place given in Puritan exposition to experience, and its acceptance as a primary authority. . . . The interest is primarily not dogmatic, at least not in any theoretic sense, it is experimental. There is theology, but, in a way which has hardly been known since St. Augustine, it is a *theologia pectoris*."[83] According to Owen, experience encompasses not just a person's past, but his emotional response to the present. Owen emphasizes the importance of man's holistic framework; one cannot understand the image unless he emphasizes the role of one's experiences and affections. Thus, he claims that the

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[80] *Works*, 3: 503.

[81] One reason why so many previous scholars have overlooked the vital role of the affections may be traced to Owen's own inconsistency and fluidity of language. At times he will often not mention the affections, instead focusing upon the mind, will, understanding, etc. The difficulty is that Owen will sometimes use these terms interchangeably, and then at other times in juxtaposition. For examples of Owen including the affections as part of the faculties, see *Works*, 2: 34, 172; 3: 420, 437, etc.

[82] *Works*, 3: 7

[83] Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago: UCP, 1947, repr.: 1992), 7.

Spirit "doth not comfort us by words, but by things. . . . Give unto a soul an experience, a taste, of the love and grace of God in Christ Jesus, and be its condition what it will, it cannot refuse to be comforted."[84] One quickly notices how Owen freely mixes the language of experience with vivid emotive vocabulary. Again, one sees Owen advocating a holistic understanding of the *imago*. How one feels can be as significant as how one thinks. However, as part of the image, the affections have also suffered from the fall.

Originally the affections were properly oriented toward God.[85] Man loved his Creator and experienced fellowship with him. However, Owen argues that the fall brought consequences to man's affections. Now each person's affections have become confused and disoriented.[86] Given this natural disruption, Aristotle's view of a person's desires following the guidance of his reason towards what is worthy of affection becomes impossible. On this point, there is both continuity and discontinuity between Aristotle and Owen.

For Aristotle, the affections naturally tend toward disorder and therefore can create ethical and other problems. The Greek philosopher describes the conflict within the human soul with a vivid illustration: "For exactly as paralysed limbs when we intend to move them to the right turn on the contrary to the left, so is it with the soul; the impulses of incontinent people move in contrary directions."[87] He goes on to conclude that there must clearly be some other principle within the soul besides the rational, and it is this principle which causes disruption. So we see that the soul of a human is composed of both a rational and an irrational principle and that – problematically – the two often conflict. The irrational leads the soul in one direction while the rational attempts to steer in the other. For Aristotle the bottom line is that the rational element of the soul must rule the untrustworthy irrational, and when this happens there is order. Thus morality becomes possible for both the individual and the community. Having this in mind, one can understand his contrast between the continent and incontinent man: the latter, "knowing that what he does is bad, does it

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[84] *Works*, 3: 391.

[85] *Works*, 17: 39-42; [*BT*, 20-24].

[86] *Works*, 3: 450. Cf. *Works*, 2: 62-3: "as we are, so are all our affections. . . We love one, one day, and hate him the next."

[87] *EN* 1102 b 18-22.

as a result of passion"; the former, "knowing that his appetites are bad, refuses on account of his rational principle to follow them."[88]

Owen similarly believes that human affections have become corrupted and lead humans astray, but this is a tragic *consequence* of the fall rather than the original design. Prior to the fall human affections faithfully pointed the heart toward the gracious Creator. Given the catastrophe of the original human rebellion, human affections *now* cannot be trusted – thus resembling Aristotle's view. According to Owen, as with the other aspects of the image, the Spirit provides the only hope for renewal of the affections.

As a puritan theologian Owen maintains that the Spirit uses different methods to shape and mold the believer's affections. Afflictions sometimes provide the impetus for necessary reshaping of a person's affections.[89] Difficult experiences cause humans to depend upon God, and this dependence deeply touches one's affections. The Spirit also works

> by supplying believers with experiences of the truth, and reality, and excellency, of the things that are believed. Experience is the food of all grace, which it grows and thrives upon. Every taste that faith obtains of divine love and grace, or how gracious the Lord is, adds to its measure and stature.[90]

Grace is not simply a truth, it is also a feeling. A change in disposition affects how one views the world and how one reacts to challenges. When the Spirit renews a person's affections, his delight is found in the things of God. Christ, as the perfect image, again provides the ultimate example.

Owen argues that Christ had affections, and because his disposition remained uncorrupted by sin, his faculties worked perfectly. Christ demonstrates how one should have deep affections for God the Father and one's fellowman. When viewing his fellowman, Christ showed tremendous compassion toward their state of sinfulness.[91] Such compassion, however, was not a matter of willpower in which he persuaded himself to love those around him. Rather, it was the outworking of his disposition shaped by a deep affection for his heavenly Father. Owen believed what principally motivated Christ "in the whole was his unspeakable zeal for, and ardency of affection unto, the glory of God. These were the coals which with a vehement

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[88] *EN* 1145 b 12-13.
[89] *Works*, 3: 447-48.
[90] *Works*, 3: 390.

flame, as it were, consumed the sacrifice."[92] The Christian who experiences the renewing work of the Spirit becomes capable of an appropriate love for God and his fellowman, following the example that Christ revealed.

The Body as part of the Image?

Having discussed the non-physical aspects of the *imago*, we may now turn our attention to the physical. Throughout the ages, theologians have found it difficult to understand the role of the body as part of the image. Augustine argued that man's body prepared him to worship God in a way animals could not.[93] However, with his neo-platonic tendencies, Augustine did not emphasize the body as part of the image. Likewise, Calvin only mentions the relationship between the image and the body in a passing comment. He notes that "although the primary seat of the divine image was in the mind and heart, or in the soul and its powers, yet there was no part of man, nor even the body itself, in which some sparks did not glow."[94] Owen has received criticism for a similar neglect of the body. It has been claimed that Owen's "concept of man . . . suggests the Platonic depreciation of the physical. . . ."[95] Owen, however, developed a stronger connection between the body and the image than many of his orthodox predecessors. This may in part be the result of his Aristotelian education – although fairly standard among his predecessors – which clearly emphasized the connection between the soul and body, or form and matter. So for example, Owen speaks of the link between the body and soul as the "greatest, the nearest, the firmest" union that can exist. Body and soul are not easily distinguished and separated. "The soul and body are naturally and necessarily unwilling to fall into a state of separation, wherein the one shall cease to be what it was, and the other knows not clearly how it

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[91] *Works*, 3: 177.

[92] *Works*, 3: 177-78.

[93] Augustine claims that because man stands erect, he is elevated above the animals and is therefore not to "seek earthly things as do the cattle, whose pleasure is entirely from the earth, in consequence of which they are all inclined forward on their bellies and bend downwards." In contradistinction, man's body was designed appropriately to fit his rational soul "because of the fact that he stands erect, able to look up to heaven and gaze upon the higher regions in the corporeal world." *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. and ed. John Hammond Taylor, 2 vols., *Ancient Christian Writers Series* 41-42 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 1: 193 [6.12.22]. Augustine also appears to have believed that the male body represents the image, whereas the female body does not, cf. 1: 98 [3.22.34]; 2: 26 [7.24.35].

[94] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.15.3.

[95] Bass, 117.

shall subsist. The body claspeth about the soul, and the soul receiveth strange impressions from its embraces; the entire nature, existing in the union of them both, being unalterably averse unto a dissolution."[96]

The body and the other aspects of the image must function together. When a person attempts to describe the image without incorporating the body, his description is necessarily incomplete.

> *Our whole souls*, in the rectitude of all their faculties and powers, in order unto the life of God and his enjoyment, did *bear his image*. Nor was it confined unto the soul only; *the body also*, not as to its shape, figure, or natural use, but as an essential part of our nature, was interested in the image of God by a *participation* of original righteousness. Hence *the whole person* was a meet principle for the communication of this image of God unto others, by the means of *natural propagation, which is an act of the entire person*; for a person created and abiding in the image of God, begetting another in his own image and likeness, had, by virtue of the covenant of creation, begotten him in the image of God also, – that is, had communicated unto him a nature upright and pure.[97]

A strong element of mystery remains in Owen's words – resembling Calvin's ambiguous comment noted above – but Owen does stretch his conclusions as far as he thinks biblical.

The body was originally good, and therefore its design oriented itself toward God. Nevertheless, as with the other aspects of the image, it became corrupted by sin. In a post-fallen world, the natural inclination of the body moves toward sin and "disorderly motions."[98] With regeneration, the Spirit's activity begins to transform the human "body." How this occurs remains a mystery. What is clear, according to Owen, is that "true sanctification reacheth unto the body" as well as the other faculties of the image.[99] Maintaining his language of hierarchy within man, and sounding particularly Aristotelian, Owen argues, "although our souls are the first proper subject of the infused habit or principle of holiness, yet our bodies, as essential parts of our natures, are partakers thereof."[100] Each Christian must seek holiness for his whole person. This includes specific warnings and exhortations regarding the particular sins

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[96] *Works*, 1: 281-82.

[97] *Works*, 3: 417-18. Emphases mine.

[98] *Works*, 3: 420. Elsewhere he writes: "Our bodies were made vile by the entrance of sin; thence they became brothers to the worms, and sisters unto corruption." *Works*, 1: 245.

[99] *Works*, 3: 422.

[100] *Works*, 3: 420. Cf. Aquinas' similar psychology, Frederick Copleston, *Augustine to Scotus*, 9 vols., vol. 2, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Image Books, 1985), esp. 375-85.

against the body about which the Apostle Paul mentions.[101] Physical bodies are not necessarily evil, but they must be redirected toward God and disciplined to function again in an ordered fashion. Only regeneration sets the physical aspect of the *imago* back on the path toward God.

Tracing the Image through the History of Salvation

A brief diachronic tracing of humanity from Owen's perspective further reveals and reinforces his conception of the relationship between humanity's past, present, and future. Only when viewing the *imago* from these different angles can one fairly represent the fullness of Owen's thought. Beginning with man before the fall, we shall quickly trace the cosmic events that shape him and lead to his eternal destiny.

According to Owen, prior to the fall Adam represented humanity's communion with God. There was the promise of unending life and fellowship with God if man would remain faithful to God's original design. Proper worship of God is the essence of humanity's uncorrupted nature, and this worship must engage his whole being.[102] The orientation of his being is significant because it either allows or hinders man's ability to worship. That is why Owen concentrates upon a person's disposition (cf. Aristotle's states of character), rather than his actions. The disposition of humanity before the fall properly oriented itself to God. In Adam's disposition one sees the original concept of a person as the *imago*.

> In this image [Adam] was created, or it was con-created with him, as a perfection due to his nature in the condition wherein he was made. This gave him an habitual disposition unto all duties of that obedience that was required of him; it was the rectitude of all the faculties of his soul with respect unto his supernatural end.[103]

Before the fall, man functioned properly. Each faculty of the *imago* (e.g., mind, will, affections) worked together and in submission to God. This placed man in a situation where he could worship God naturally, since this ability for fellowship and communion with God lay "written into [humanity's] very constitution."[104] Yet, when

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[101] *Works*, 3: 426-27.
[102] *Works*, 1: 48. See also Works, 1: 206.
[103] *Works*, 3: 285
[104] S. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life (*1987), 274.

temptation came and Adam and Eve responded inappropriately, sin brought chaos to what had once functioned in an orderly way.[105]

Owen compares three significant differences between the image before and after the fall.[106] First, before the fall, man was distinct from the rest of creation in his representation of God's holiness and righteousness. Second, since man was the image of God he was "a means of rendering actual glory unto him from all other parts of the creation."[107] In other words, all of creation was dependent upon humanity to voice their praise. Creation was "as an harmonious, well-tuned instrument, which gives no sound unless there be a skilful hand to move and act it."[108] Third, man was originally created to experience "eternal enjoyment" in his relationship with the Creator. However, sin's entrance dramatically altered these three points. Because of sin, there is nothing that distinctly and faithfully represents God's image on earth. Additionally, the rest of creation suffers due to the fact that "man by sin did not only draw off himself from that relation unto God wherein he was made, but drew off the whole creation here below with himself into a uselessness unto his glory."[109] Finally, sin caused man to lose his "power and ability" to enjoy his relationship with God for eternity. Owen uses these three points to show the consequences of original sin: humanity was no longer distinct from creation, creation was no longer able to worship God actively, and man's ability to enjoy God for eternity was lost.

A cosmic shift took place after the fall of humanity. Although sin now predisposes humanity to unrest, disorder, and rebellion, Owen acknowledges that there are certain external pressures that tend to set limits upon man, restraining his tendencies to sin. These external actions are not Owen's vital concern, they are simply the outward manifestation of an inward reality. Unredeemed man remains in a sad condition: "the disease is uncured, the soul continues still in its disorder and in all inward confusion; for our original order, harmony, and rectitude, consisted in the powers and inclinations of our minds, wills, and affections, unto regular actings towards God as our end and reward."[110] Sin changed man from the inside out. Humanity now acts like Aristotle's irrational and incontinent man: the psychological

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[105] *Works*, 1: 61.
[106] *Works*, 1: 182-185.
[107] *Works*, 1: 183.
[108] *Works*, 1: 183.
[109] *Works*, 1: 184.
[110] *Works*, 3: 643.

hierarchy has been replaced by unbridled passions, improperly directed actions, and tainted minds.[111]

No aspect of the *imago* remains unscathed by the intrusion of sin into the world. Owen views the destruction of sin in a holistic manner; he uses his categories for the *imago* to explain how sin effects the entire human being. After the fall humanity is "wholly defiled, polluted, and [in] every way unclean. There is a spiritual leprosy spread all over our natures, which renders us loathsome to God, and puts us in a state of separation from him."[112] The language of depravity only makes sense to Owen when viewed through the lens of the complete *imago*. All other attempts to explain the results of sin tend to emphasize one aspect of man to the neglect of another. For example, Owen combats those who see the fall as corrupting a person's will, but not his mind. This is the Philosopher's mistake which has made its way into the Church via the heresies of the Pelagians and then the 'Socinianized Arminians.'[113] According to Owen, the Bible asserts that the whole person is corrupted – including his intellect.

Without a holistic view of humanity, regeneration through the Spirit would only renew certain aspects of a person, rather than the whole human. Owen favors a position that claims sin created confusion within the whole person, and redemption is the only possible hope for humanity to escape this chaos and despair.

At this point Owen's distinction between "confusion" and "rebellion" becomes relevant.[114] *Confusion* connotes the idea of a "state" wherein there is no rule or order. When a disposition is in a state of confusion, it cannot recognize the righteous from the evil and is overwhelmed by chaos. *Rebellion* is different in that it communicates the idea of sporadic outbursts of "disturbance," but not an overall state of disorder. The Christian often wrestles with rebellion, but he is never in a state of confusion. Rebellion is not strong enough in the Christian to overthrow "the rule of grace," but it may nevertheless manifest itself in violent outbursts. Owen makes this point to allow for authentic Christian struggle while maintaining a distinction between

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[111] Cf. *Works,* 1: 401: "The stream of [fallen human affections] will cloud and darken the understanding, that it shall not be able clearly to discern any spiritual object,–least of all the greatest of them. There is nothing more acknowledged, even in things natural and moral, than that the disorder of the passions and affections will blind, darken, and deceive the mind in its operations."

[112] *Works*, 3: 449.

[113] *Works*, 3: 244-45. Cf. Gerard Reedy, "Socinians, John Toland, and the Anglican Rationalists," *HTR* 70 (1977): 285-304.

the redeemed and unconverted man. The fall brought confusion to all men, but through the death of Christ applied to the elect by the Spirit, there is now a positive change from a state of confusion to individual acts of rebellion.

The change of orientation for the redeemed accompanies the next catastrophic event that occurs within humans. In the beginning, man was without sin and disposed to God, but since the fall his natural inclination turns him away from his Creator.[115] Movement away from God means a movement away from properly understanding oneself, which creates a confusion of sorts within the person.[116] For the redeemed, however, a process begins that directs man back to God and back to a right understanding of himself.

While man's redemption becomes possible only by the work of Christ, the application and actualization of redemption are only possible by the work of the Holy Spirit.[117] This theme undergirds Owen's entire treatise on the Holy Spirit. Owen spends a great deal of time exploring the role of the Spirit in restoring man to the image of God: "Now, this whole evil frame is cured by the effectual working of the Holy Ghost in the rectifying and renovation of our natures. He giveth a new understanding, a new heart, new affections, renewing the whole soul into the image of God."[118] However, the Spirit's role does not end with the experience of regeneration. When a person has come to faith there is an essential and ongoing change in his disposition. Once regeneration occurs, the Spirit's role in a believer's life concentrates on the process of sanctification. Owen's emphasis upon the image of God in man provides the framework for understanding this process of sanctification.

A definition from Owen of sanctification reveals the link between the *imago* and the work of the Spirit.

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[114] See *Works*, 3: 645.

[115] "And this beauty originally consisted in the image of God in us, which contained the whole order, harmony, and symmetry of our natures, in all their faculties and actions, with respect unto God and our utmost end." *Works*, 3: 430.

[116] Cf. *Works*, 3: 266.

[117] Cf. *Works*, 3: 299.

[118] *Works*, 3: 437. Owen is by no means unique in his use of faculty psychology when explaining human redemption. Matthew Barker, when discussing 'union with Christ' also clearly portrays this orientation. Man's communion with God "consisteth of the Divine Operations of our Souls towards God, when the faculties of the Soul are tending towards him, and terminated upon him; when the Mind is exercised in the contemplation of him, the Will in chusing and embracing him, when the Affections are fixt upon him, and center in him, when by our Desires we pursue after him, by our Love we cleave to him, and by Delight we acquiesce and solace ourselves in him," *A Continuation of Morning-Exercise* (1683) Sermon xix, 1022, cited by Tudor Jones, "Union with Christ: The Existential Nerve of Puritan Piety," *TB* 41: 2 (Nov. 1990): 188.

> Sanctification is an immediate work of the Spirit of God on the souls of believers, purifying and cleansing of their natures from the pollution and uncleanness of sin, renewing in them the image of God, and thereby enabling them, from a spiritual and habitual principle of grace, to yield obedience unto God, according unto the tenor and terms of the new covenant; by virtue of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Or more briefly:–It is the universal renovation of our natures by the Holy Spirit into the image of God, through Jesus Christ.[119]

The goal of sanctification, according to Owen, is clearly the goal of holiness: the renewing of the Christian in his whole being – mind, heart, will – into the image of Christ. This process can only take place when a person moved by the Spirit turns from self to Christ, who is the perfect image of God.[120] Only the Spirit can change a person's disposition.

While Owen often employs the term disposition, he also uses the word habit to communicate the process of renewal in the *imago*.[121] These should not be viewed as different ideas, but rather as two terms communicating the same concept. Here Owen falls within the history of theological discourse that has used Aristotle's language of *hexis* and translated it as *habitus* in order to communicate the same idea, since habit and disposition can both be used as English translations of both terms. Aquinas serves as the classic example of a sophisticated theological handling of the idea of *habitus*.[122] Though Owen sometimes uses habit when simply referring to learned, reinforced, and repeated actions,[123] he also uses the term in a classical sense.[124] In full

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[119] *Works*, 3: 386. Elsewhere Owen describes sanctification as: "the immediate work of God by his Spirit upon our whole nature, proceeding from the peace made for us by Jesus Christ, whereby, being changed into his likeness, we are kept entirely in peace with God, and are preserved unblamable, or in a state of gracious acceptation with him, according to the terms of the covenant, unto the end." *Works*, 3: 369.

[120] *Works*, 3: 452.

[121] E.g., *Works*, 3: 5, 102, 220, 252, etc. Cf. with footnote #75 above on *infusus habitus*.

[122] See Aquinas, *ST*, esp. 1a2ae.49-55, cf. Appendix 2 of Blackfriars edition, vol. 22. For Protestant scholastic interaction with Aquinas on *habitus*, see Heppe, *RD*, 323-24. Note also the wide range of contexts in which the language of *habitus* may be understood, e.g., Ames, 81, 112, esp. 224, 329; Francis Turrettin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1992), 18-20; Muller, *PRRD* 1, 157, 226-33; Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: A Study of Theological Prolegomena*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Saint Louis: Confordia, 1970), 78-9, 155.

[123] Cf. *Works*, 3: 475.

[124] Etymologically the word "habit" comes from the Latin *habitus*, which was originally the past participle of the verb *habere*, 'have.' It was used as a noun to mean "how one is," and the connotation referred to a person's state, or condition. See John Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origins: The Histories of more than 8,000 English-Language Words* (New York: Arcade, 1990), 270. Previous theologians, especially the scholastics, used *habitus* to refer to a "spiritual capacity." Muller, *DLGTT* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 134, notes that "the scholastics assumed that, in addition to defining the faculties of the soul, they also had to acknowledge the capacities or dispositions of those faculties. A

agreement with Aristotle, Owen quotes from his definition of a virtue as a habit.[125] The relationship between a person's will and his habit is indissoluble. As noted earlier, man's actions – which are manifestations of his will – are the result of his habit or disposition.[126] Therefore, a fundamental transformation of a person's disposition best describes the process of sanctification. A person's "habitual defilement" is removed by the cleansing of the Spirit who applies the work of Christ to a new believer's life. Yet, not only does a negation occur, but there is also the positive gift of "habitual grace" which opposes the natural lusts of fallen human nature.[127] This new habit applies naturally to his faculty schema: "in the understanding, it is light; in the will, obedience; in the affections, love; in all, faith."[128] At times this language sounds somewhat similar to Aristotle's emphasis on the role of training and education, although Owen grounds his discussion in the work of the Holy Spirit rather than human efforts. As the image is renewed, a person's habit or disposition is redirected toward God and holiness. On such theological grounds Owen would more accurately be understood as having digested a form of virtue ethics coming from Aquinas rather than directly from an unbaptized Aristotle.

Finally, in Owen's treatises there is relatively little emphasis upon the eschatological conclusion for humanity, focusing rather on the process of sanctification.[129] The eschatological emphasis that we do find, as we will see for example in chapter six, is often centered on Christ's *accomplished* work, rather than on what is yet to come. Nevertheless, Owen provides enough material for the reader to know that the end for which he strives is perfect communion with the living God. Fellowship with God is clearly the ultimate goal for the longing heart. This communion begins before glory, as it prepares the believer for a holy and eternal

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faculty cannot receive a datum or act in a manner for which it has no capacity." Owen likewise uses habit to refer to a person's disposition.

[125] *Works*, 3: 502-503

[126] Note that the plural is often used in these contexts, thus theologians – including Owen – will speak of habits and dispositions (including habits of the will, of the mind, etc). What harmonizes this plurality is the unity of the person, and for the sake of our concerns it is legitimate to simply use the singular. For example, Owen believes that one habit cannot be fallen or transformed without affecting the others habits, since a person's habits are ultimately interdependent and may be considered as a whole.

[127] *Works*, 2: 172.

[128] *Works*, 2: 172.

[129] For a overview of Owen's eschatological views, often discussed in relationship to politics, see S. Ferguson, *John Owen* (1987), esp. 275-79; Smith, 335-349; Toon, "A Message of Hope," 82-96; L. G. Williams, "*Digitus Dei*," reviewed in chapter one.

relationship with the Lord. Undefiled and continuous communion with God may only occur with a full renewal of the image in man. This renewal includes the sanctification of each aspect of the *imago*. Only by the work of the Holy Spirit is this possible: "whereby the mind is effectually renewed, the heart changed, the affections sanctified, all actually and effectually, or no deliverance will be wrought, obtained, or ensue, out of the estate" in which the unregenerate man finds himself.[130] The Christian lives in the process of sanctification, and yet he longs for the state of glorification. As Owen writes elsewhere, in heaven the glory of Christ is no longer a question of faith since it is "heightened into vision."[131] A person's nature will be perfected in glory, "especially in all the faculties, powers, and affections of our souls and all their operations."[132] In this consummate state there will be no sin or limitation to the enjoyment of being in the presence of God. Until then, every believer remains in the world of potential, awaiting the time when his sanctification becomes completely realized. Sanctification is "a great work in itself, that wherein the renovation of the image of God in us doth consist, yet is it not wrought in any but with respect unto a farther end in this world; and this end is, that we may live to God. We are made like unto God, that we may live unto God."[133]

With this background we may end with a brief anecdote. Believing that contemplating Christ as the image of God best prepares one for heaven, Owen was motivated to write his work, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ, in His Person, Office, and Grace: with the Differences Between Faith and Sight; Applied unto the Use of them that Believe.*[134] We have used numerous examples from this treatise in the above examination. Yet when on his deathbed, having just found out that this book finally went to the press, Owen's recorded response encapsulates his eschatological perspective. He was glad about the news, but replied, "the long looked-for day is come at last, in which I shall see that glory in another manner than I have ever done yet, or was capable of doing in this world!"[135] He believed he would

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[130] *Works*, 3: 315. Cf. *Works*, 1: 405-06, where he claims the "faculties of our souls shall then be made perfect."

[131] *Works*, 7: 339.

[132] *Works*, 7: 340.

[133] *Works*, 3: 482.

[134] *Works*, 1: 273-415.

[135] *Works*, 1: 274.

soon see the perfect image face to face, and thus he would be fully conformed to that image.

Conclusion

Outlining John Owen's formulation of the *imago Dei* provides a key to understanding this Puritan's anthropology. Owen's Christocentric focus leads him to appeal to the incarnate image as the true image of God. Christ exhibits how the various aspects of the image should cooperate and enable the worship of God. Owen's attempt at a holistic conception of the image includes a vibrant understanding of the various faculties that make worshipping God possible. By following the history of salvation we saw that Owen not only describes how the image became defaced, but also how it may be restored. As the image, a human being is created in right relations with God, and only through Christ may the sinner enjoy renewed relations. The hope this seventeenth century theologian offers is that the Spirit of Christ faithfully renovates the whole person and prepares him for glorification.

Finally, we see from our study in this chapter that Owen clearly demonstrates both continuity and discontinuity with Aristotle. Considering our specific point of interest, it becomes apparent that the ancient paradigm of faculty psychology pervades Owen's presuppositions, and thus makes its way into the fabric of his theological discourse. We do not want to push the language of a 'direct influence' from Aristotle too far, but clearly there is strong evidence for indirect influence which affects Owen's theology. Using the intellectual currency of his day, Owen presupposes the fundamental accuracy of basic Aristotelian psychology. He employs faculty psychology to help explain how one might understand the *imago Dei*. At this point Owen represents both a long theological heritage and many of his Puritan contemporaries. What is most interesting is how his presentation aims to use this framework to offer a more holistic view of the human being.

While showing signs of continuity, Owen also significantly differs from his philosophical predecessor's fundamentally optimistic view of humanity. Here the radical nature of sin, a foreign concept to Aristotle, causes Owen to modify this primitive psychology to fit his theological conception of a fallen world. This difference demonstrates that Owen only employs Aristotelian ideas to the degree that

he thinks accurately fits the biblical data, and when Aristotle falls short of that criteria, Owen abandons his philosophy.

Having this background of how humanity was originally designed as the image of God, and how the fall affected that image, we are now prepared to observe how Owen seeks to answer the critical question of how reconciliation occurs between God and humanity. In order to answer this we will turn our attention to Owen's Christology, paying particular attention to his view of the incarnation.

Chapter 3

Humanity Actualized:
The Relationship between the Incarnation and Fallen Humanity

The incarnation is the "most absurd conception that ever befell the minds of men."[1]
JOHN OWEN (1677)

"Had not God been thus mindful of man, and visited him in the person of his Son incarnate, every one partaker of that nature must have utterly perished in their lost condition."[2]
JOHN OWEN (1668)

Introduction

A customary feature of systematic theology is the careful division of topics into various *loci*. Following this common practice can tremendously aid the student's understanding of biblical and historical questions. However, if these divisions become overly rigid and compartmentalized there is a danger that the different categories may appear unrelated.

John Owen's methodology seeks to avoid such a danger by fluidly moving between the various doctrines, consistently showing not only how they relate to one another, but also how they relate to common Christian experience. Our study of Owen's theological anthropology hopes to reflect his approach. While some might question the inclusion of Christological and Soteriological observations in the midst of an anthropological study, it is our contention that without such detailed analysis Owen's underlying anthroposensitivity cannot be fully appreciated. Accordingly, the next two chapters attempt to demonstrate how Christology and the doctrine of justification fit into Owen's overall anthropology. We begin with the former.

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[1] *Works*, 5: 47.
[2] *Works*, 20: 368.

Given the vastness of Owen's extensive Christological reflections we must seriously restrict the discussion in this chapter.[3] We will begin by exploring Owen's various reasons for the necessity of the incarnation. Next we discuss Owen's strong emphasis on the Son of God's humiliation as providing the existential grounds for spiritual comfort. Finally, we will examine Owen's reflections concerning the true humanity of Jesus Christ. This final section argues that, according to Owen, only by maintaining the continuities and discontinuities between Jesus' human nature and fallen human nature can one preserve effective soteriology and a true affirmation of shared humanity. Through these observations we gain an insightful glimpse into how Owen's anthroposensitivity works itself out practically.

Why the incarnation?

Throughout our discussion of the *imago Dei* in chapter two we highlighted both the dignity of the original creation and the devastating implications of the human plunge into moral chaos. Moving beyond our original overview we may now proceed to Owen's more specific discussions. Since the focus of this chapter is on the person of Christ, we must begin with further reflection on the question, *why was the incarnation necessary?* Only by starting with this question can the full gravity of Owen's discussion of the humanity of Jesus make sense.

The Human Debt

According to Owen, "Religion" was originally pure, orderly, and beautiful.[4] In this state man "was fit and able to glorify" God because he was made in his image. Nevertheless, this should not be confused with the idea that God somehow made humanity partially divine. "Whatever perfection God had communicated" to human nature was susceptible to failure unless it was also uniquely united with himself through a "personal union." In other words, humanity was mutable and responsible while God remained immutable and Sovereign. While in the garden Adam and Eve communed with God freely until they chose to dishonor their Creator. One result of

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[3] For further studies of various aspects of Owen's Christology see, Daniels; Spence, "Incarnation and Inspiration,"; Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 151-198; R. K. M. Wright. See chapter one for brief reviews and discussions of these works. Despite all of this research a great deal more may be gained from further careful study of Owen's Christology, both for historical and theological disciplines (e.g., the assumption, humanity of Christ, etc.).

this tragedy was God's revelation that "no gracious relation between him and our nature could be stable and permanent, *unless our nature was assumed into personal union and subsistence with himself.*"[5] Humanity now struggles to find rest and peace with God, but such relief in this new environment could only come through a unique mediator.[6]

Only a mediator who was both truly God and truly human could redeem fallen humanity. In this assertion Owen reflects not only a long tradition within western theology going back to Chalcedon, but also the modifications of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, with its common theological emphasis on judicial satisfaction theory. In order that "human nature might be restored," it became necessary for a person to live in perfect obedience to God and his law, yet more than simple obedience was necessary. This unique person's obedience needed to be such that he "should give and bring more glory and *honour* unto [God's] holiness than there was dishonour reflected on it by the disobedience of us all."[7] Owen believes this equation preserves both God's glory and the reality of the sinful human dilemma.

The theological problem remains that an ordinary person could not adequately fulfill this role. God's character demands both the perfect life of an individual and the necessary punishment of sin required by divine justice. Perfect obedience offered to God by a finite human would be sufficient for him, but his actions could not benefit others; he was simply doing what was required of a creature responding faithfully to his Creator. For Owen, the person who offers this perfect obedience to God

> must be one who was not originally obliged thereunto, on his own account, or for himself. And this must be a divine person, and none other; for every mere creature is so obliged. And there is nothing more fundamental in Gospel principles, than that the Lord Christ, in his divine person, was above the law, and for himself owed no obedience thereunto; but by his own condescension, as he was 'made of a woman' for us, so he was 'made under the law' for us.[8]

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[4] See *Works*, 1: 48 for this discussion.

[5] *Works*, 1: 48. Emphasis mine.

[6] Cf. *Works*, 1: 52.

[7] *Works*, 1: 200. Emphasis mine. Here we find hints of Anselm's language of "honor" breaking through.

[8] *Works*, 1: 201. See also *Works*, 1: 208-9; 2: 162. Cf. the Patristic language and ideas as represented by Novatian, *The Trinity*, ch. 11, *Fathers of the Church*, Vol. 67, pp. 46-47, [or *ANF* vol. 5] cited by Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology Two* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), 188: "And in the same manner that He [Christ], as Man, is made under the Law, so is He also, as God, declared to be the Lord of the Sabbath.... In the same manner that He, as Man, goes to the Father, so as a Son obedient to His Father shall he descend from the Father.... However, when you read both these truths, there is danger that you will believe not both of them but only one." Owen's contemporary William Sherlock, *A Discourse Concerning the Knowledge of Jesus Christ, and our*

Therefore, only the person who is "divine and infinite" could fulfill this requirement; for his obedience needed to be of "infinite value," which leads Owen to conclude "he must be God." This roughly resembles Anselm's argument in *Cur Deus Homo*:[9] all of humanity has "dishonored" (c.f., sinned against) God. There are only two options for each person who so sins against God: either the honor taken from God must be repaid or punishment must follow. God cannot lose his honor; therefore an individual may either freely be subject to God or God will subject that person to himself by torment.[10] Anselm goes on to argue that although only God can make satisfaction, *no one ought to make it except man* otherwise *man* does not make satisfaction. Since no one but God can make it, and no one but man ought to make it, "it is necessary for a God-man to make it."[11] The person to make satisfaction must be both "perfect God and perfect man, because none but true God can make it and none but true man owes it."[12] Owen's arguments show similarity to this traditional presentation, though at times he reflects his seventeenth century context by stressing the "wrath of God" more than the honor of God, the latter emphasis being far more Anselmian.[13]

From this we quickly learn that Owen's discussions of the humanity of Jesus naturally tend to take place under the umbrella of the *person* of Christ and thereby in conjunction with his divinity. Great error occurs, according to Owen, if the theologian does not always remember the two natures of the Mediator and instead stresses one to the neglect of the other.

Union and Communion with him, etc. (London: 1674), could not understand this distinction and considers it "to no purpose," 310. Owen answer's him in *Works*, 2: 356-8.

[9] See Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham.*, ed. and trans. Eugene R. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 100-183.

[10] Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 122, 123.

[11] Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 151. Cf. Owen speaking about Christ's obedience: "We were obliged unto [obedience], and could not perform it; – he was not obliged unto it any otherwise but by a free act of his own will, and did perform it. God gave him this honour, that he should obey for the whole church," *Works*, 1: 339.

[12] Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 152.

[13] Cf. Owen, *Works*, 1: 479, *GC*: "Q. Was it necessary that our Redeemer should be God? A. Yes; that he might be able to save to the uttermost, and to *satisfy the wrath* of his Father, which no creature could perform. . . . Q. Wherefore was our Redeemer to be man? A. That the nature which had offended might suffer, and make satisfaction, and so he might be every way a *fit and sufficient* Saviour for men" (emphasis mine).

The Creator/creature Distinction

Not only has sin caused a great chasm between God and humanity, but there is also the Creator/creature distinction. Human beings – and all other creatures – do not have the faculties to comprehend God in his essence.[14] To argue otherwise inevitably results in either a heretical limiting of God or an improper exaltation of humanity. Owen demonstrates this idea by paraphrasing Eusebius' analogy of the sun and its rays.[15] The sun is a wonderful life-giving source for the world. Creation greatly benefits from the communication of the sun's heat, light, and refreshment, but only because the sun is mediated through its beams. If the actual sun were to descend unto the earth the result would be destruction, for "nothing could bear its heat and lustre... and all things [would] be swallowed up and consumed by its greatness." Even so, the unmediated glory of the Father remains an unapproachable light. "We cannot bear the immediate approach of the Divine Being; but through him, as incarnate, are all things communicated unto us, in a way suited unto our reception and comprehension."[16] The Divine-human encounter becomes possible only in light of the incarnation. Later in this study we will see more particularly how the *assumption* of human nature by the Son of God not only demonstrates God's loving initiative toward humanity, but it also provides the only way of mediation and communion between God and man.

Human limitations ultimately point to the need for the incarnation. While it is true that the "invisible things of God," which include "his eternal power and Godhead," are testified to in his creation, a problem remains. The sum of creation can only point weakly to "divine excellencies" since creation is "all finite and limited, and so cannot properly represent that which is infinite and immense."[17] Confusion on this point can lead to idolatry: worshipping the creation rather than the Creator.

One reason that humanity tends toward idolatry grows from a deep internal yearning for a satisfying object of worship. Owen believes that all humanity has

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[14] *Works*, 1: 66.

[15] *Works*, 1: 15-16. From Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica*, IV.5-6. Book IV deals with prophetic evidence of Christ's divinity, while book III attempts to give such evidence for Christ's humanity. See Johannes Quasten, *Patrology, Vol. III: The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicaea to the Council of Chalcedon* (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1960), 331-32.

[16] *Works*, 1: 16.

[17] *Works*, 1: 67. Cf. *Works*, 20: 344: "These glorious works of God [i.e., creation] do indeed show the infinite glory of him that made them. This is the use that men should have made of their contemplation of them, and not have chosen them for their gods..." He goes on (20: 344-350) to claim that creation reveals God's greatness, his infinite self-sufficiency, his infinite and eternal power, his wisdom, and his goodness. Cf. also *Works*, 20: 366.

"always had a common apprehension that there was *a need of a nearer and more full representation of God unto them*," a need that no element of creation could satisfy.[18] Here Owen bases much of his argument on Romans 1. This longing within humanity feeds an inclination towards idolatry, which manifests itself in a desire to create representations of God fashioned after "birds, four-footed beasts, and creeping things."[19] Satan exploited this human propensity which desires to approach the divine being via earthy representations. This was Satan's common practice, argues Owen, in perverting the Gentiles who so often devised ways to "bring God into human nature." The God of Israel had consistently revealed throughout history that "this practice of making representations of him" was improper, and consequently to be dealt with by serious punishments.

The question then becomes, why did God place such restrictions upon this common human longing? Owen's answer is twofold. First, God had made provision that "a glorious image and representation of himself, infinitely above what any created wisdom could find out" would come.[20] However, humanity must in good faith wait upon God's wisdom and timing, showing patience and trust in God. Such patience is scarce, as demonstrated by the Israelites' failure to wait for Moses' return from the mount after meeting with God. Instead of waiting for *God's* revelation *they* built themselves an idol. Even so, many who impatiently plunged into idolatrous worship – as *they* tried to "bring God nearer" to themselves – ended by becoming "contemptibly foolish." They "abased their nature" in such a way that the result was the "utmost distance from God, whom they sought to bring near unto them."[21]

Second, God had already provided some means of *limited* representations of his presence, "though not of his being."[22] These ordained temporary representations came through 1) God's works of creation and 2) "the visible institutions of his worship." While helpful, even these divine signs were insufficient to allow humans to worship God "in a due manner." Though much may be gained from these pointers to God, none "represent God as the complete object of all our affections, of all the actings of our souls in faith, trust, love, fear, obedience, in that way whereby he may

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[18] *Works*, 1: 67. Emphasis mine.
[19] *Works*, 1: 68.
[20] *Works*, 1: 68.
[21] *Works*, 1: 68.
[22] *Works*, 1: 69.

be glorified, and we may be brought unto the everlasting fruition of him."[23] These signs alone were unable to completely satisfy every human faculty, although they *pointed* to One who could.

The human longing for a fuller representation of God was not completely satisfied through idolatry nor through the positive signs of God found in creation and the institutions of worship.[24] Consequently, Owen concludes that the incarnation was necessary and part of God's plan of redemption. Only in Jesus Christ are "the complete image and perfect representation of the Divine Being and excellencies" found.[25] To see Jesus is to see the Father in a way completely different from previous representations of God.

The Son who was Sent

Given the need for a fuller representation of the Godhead via the incarnation, which person of the Trinity should assume human flesh? Recognizing great mystery in discussing the Divine Counsel, Owen only provides a general answer. What he does believe is that there are "three distinct persons in the holy Trinity," and for divine reason "it became the wisdom of God that the Son, the second person, should undertake this work, and be incarnate."[26] For Owen, the exact reasons for this decision remain outside finite speculation, and to look into such unrevealed matters does not edify or advance the faith. This anti-speculative mood prompts Owen to restrict his inquiry to what he believes the scriptures clearly reveal – though one often hears more the echo of the sophisticated early Fathers than the enigmatic statements of the New Testament.

While only the second person becomes incarnate, it remains the work of the Triune God. The best way to approach this mystery, according to Owen, is through the "order of the holy persons of the blessed Trinity in their operations; for their order

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[23] *Works*, 1: 69.

[24] Cf. *Works*, 1: 221: "Alas! the light of divine wisdom in the greatest works of nature holds not the proportion of the meanest star unto the sun in its full strength, unto that glory of it which shines in the mystery of God manifest in the flesh, and the work accomplished thereby!"

[25] *Works*, 1: 69. Cf. Owen, *Glory of Christ*, *Works*, 1: 294: "Herein is [the Person of Christ] glorious, in that he is the great representative of the nature of God and his will unto us; which without him would have been eternally hid from us, or been invisible unto us; we should never have seen God at any time, here nor hereafter...." He goes on to declare that even the angels would not know the essential glory of the invisible God were it not for the Son.

[26] *Works*, 1: 218.

herein doth follow that of their subsistence."[27] His language and formulation here represent a fairly orthodox understanding common in both Patristic thought and Protestant scholasticism.[28] In Owen's thought there are three crucial elements required for the redemption of humanity: authority, love, and power, and all of these must be governed by "infinite wisdom."[29] These three characteristics "originally reside in the person of the Father, and the actings of them in [redemption] is constantly ascribed unto him."[30] Acting out of his sovereign authority the Father sends the Son and gives the Spirit. Second in the "order of subsistence" is the Son, who in the "order of operation puts the whole authority, love, and power of the Father in execution."[31] The Son faithfully carries out the desires of the Father on behalf of his people. So, "whatever is in the person of the Father is in the person of the Son, and being all received from the Father, he is his essential image."[32] Moving onto the third order of subsistence of the Trinity, Owen believes that the Holy Spirit provides "a perfecting application of the whole unto all its proper ends."[33] From this basic formulation Owen is able to deduce that "it became not [i.e., was not fitting for] the person of the Father to assume our nature," for this would wrongly reflect the Triune God's order of subsistence and operation.[34] Likewise, the Holy Spirit did not assume human nature since "in order of divine operation following that of his subsistence,"

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[27] *Works*, 1: 218. Owen's contemporary Francis Turretin, writing from the Academy of Geneva, likewise reasoned that "the order of operating follows the mode of subsisting. Hence the Father operates from himself, but the Son from the Father...." *Elenctic Theology*, 1: 281.

[28] E.g., see John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith*, 3.15 for a discussion of the language of "operation' or "energy." Here he deals both with Christological and Trinitarian questions. Cf. Owen's use of ἐνέργεια in *Works*, 2: 51. For Protestant scholasticism see Heppe, *RD*, 118 ff., which includes J. Heinrich Heidegger (1633-1698), (IV, 45): "According then to the order of subsistence and action, just as the Father is *a se*, exists and operates through Son and H. Spirit, the Son exists and operates *a Patre* through the H. Spirit, the H. Spirit exists and operates *a Patre et Filio*. So, suitably to this order of subsistence and action *ad intra*, there is also assigned to the Father *ad extra* the inauguration of thing, or creation; to the Son their continuation, or redemption; to the H. Spirit their consummation, or sanctification and regeneration. Likewise, because of the goal of the action and of the habitude peculiar to the work of the fixed person whose operation shines out most in any *opus*, the incarnation, although the work of the entire Trinity, is referred singly to the Son." Johann Henrich Alsted (1588-1638), (125): "The *opera deitatis ad extra* are common to the three persons – because they proceed from the essence. (But) as the essence is marked in the Father by a peculiar mode, and likewise in the Son and in the Spirit, so also the essential operations are distinct in the order and determination of the action." Muller, *DLGTT*, correctly concludes: "The Reformed in particular prefer to say that the persons of the Trinity are distinguished, not merely *rationaliter* or *formaliter*, but *modaliter*, according to their distinct modes of subsistence," 195.

[29] Cf. Ames, 92.

[30] *Works*, 1: 218.

[31] *Works*, 1: 219. Here he cites 1 Cor. 8:6: "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him."

[32] *Works*, 1: 218.

[33] *Works*, 1: 219.

[34] *Works*, 1: 220.

his peculiar work was to complete the divine act of redemption by applying the work of Christ to the Church. This argument, which moves between the immanent and the economic, allows Owen to reach a different conclusion than Aquinas. Whereas Aquinas seems to think that the Father *or* the Spirit, *instead of the Son*, could have become incarnate, Owen believes otherwise.[35] The conclusion Owen gleans from his meditations on the subsistence and order of the "Holy Persons" is that it remained uniquely for the Son to assume human nature.[36] Speculations beyond this general statement "must be referred unto another world."[37]

Christ as God's Revelation

On more practical grounds, Owen believes that the incarnate Son fulfills another unique role: all "spiritual truth" must ultimately find its source and connection in Christ. Employing familiar imagery, he claims that divine truth dislocated from Christ is like "a beam interrupted from its continuity unto the sun – it is immediately deprived of light."[38] All comprehension of divine truth comes only through revelation: "For in, by, and from [Christ] alone" are the truths of God "proposed unto us, that we are made partakers of them." To separate such truths from the person of Christ is to lose truth altogether. Emphatic on this point, Owen argues that Christ "is the life and soul" of all spiritual truth, and that, although these truths are attested to in "the Word," they "are but a dead letter, and that of such a character as is illegible unto us, as unto any real discovery of the grace and love of God."[39] Owen is making the point that *even scripture*, which is God's special revelation to humanity, does not have efficacy without Christ. He goes so far as to claim that the foundation of all biblical truth "was laid in the person of Christ," for Christ expresses God's attitude toward his people. All of God's action toward humanity only makes sense within the matrix of Christ, "who, as a living spirit diffused through the whole system [of divine revelation], both acts and animates it – all the treasures of truth,

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[35] See Aquinas, *ST*, 3a.3.5. Colin Gunton believes that Aquinas' view is the logical outcome of the inadequate Trinitarian heritage which was first developed by Augustine, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 97, 102.

[36] Cf. John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith*, 4.4: "The Father is Father and not Son: the Son is Son and not Father: the Holy Spirit is Spirit and not Father or Son. For the individuality is unchangeable.... Wherefore the Son of God became Son of Man in order that His individuality might endure."

[37] *Works*, 1: 220. See also chapter 5 on "Communion with the Triune God."

[38] *Works*, 1: 81-82.

[39] *Works*, 1: 82. Cf. *Works* 2: 108, 120.

wisdom, and knowledge, may be well said to be hid in him."[40] By closely tying all revelation to the person of Christ, Owen also reveals his belief that the incarnation implies a relational and epistemological necessity; for to truly *know* God or anything about him indicates some sort of relationship to Christ. Overlooking this relationship inevitably severs the beams from the sun.

Humiliation: Humanity Actualized and Redeemed in the Son

Having briefly sketched out the need for and importance of the incarnation, we can now move on to another question: What does the Bible mean when it claims that the Word was made flesh? Historically the challenge has always been to maintain both the true humanity and true deity of Jesus Christ as first portrayed in the New Testament and early church.[41] As is commonly acknowledged, the Church formulated its Christology by way of a slow development, normally spurred on by debates against early Christian heresies. Through this often painful and political process the Church was able to work out a basic Christological framework; the apex was the Council of Chalcedon (451), which offers the clearest ecumenical statement on the natures of Jesus Christ. In the brief Chalcedonian Creed the parameters for orthodox Christology are set: the guidelines require an acknowledgement that Jesus of Nazareth was "truly God and truly man."[42]

Theological reflection since that time (and even more so before the creed) has struggled to maintain both truths. Fleshing out this doctrine theologically and pastorally has never been easy as danger abounds for the theologian attempting to trek his way through Christological controversies. Since each era offers its own unique challenges and cultural biases theologians have often emphasized one truth to the

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[40] *Works*, 1: 83. Since Owen always connects application with theology, he concludes this section by claiming that "much notional knowledge of the doctrines of the Scripture" is useless if not to "form Christ in the soul, and transform the whole person into his likeness and image. . . . It is learning the truth as it is in Jesus, which alone renewth the image of God in us." *Works*, 1: 84. Note the relational emphasis here.

[41] Kelly, 138.

[42] The creed more fully reads: Jesus is "truly God and truly man, of a reasonable soul and body; consubstantial with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin." It goes on to add that Jesus must "be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son."

neglect of the other.[43] It is in this vein that our investigation of Owen proves to be most rewarding. There is no better test of a theologian's anthropological consistency than a close examination of his Christology. Does he paint a docetic Christ who only *seemed* to be human, while really never partaking in the realities of human limitations, sufferings, and pain? How does he hold together the truths of the divine and human natures in the person of Jesus Christ? Since our focus remains on Owen's anthropology we will concentrate on his dealings with the humanity of Christ, but in so doing it will prove necessary to explore the divinity of Jesus, though in less detail.

The Assumption of Human Nature

Through the influence of the later fathers, the language of assumption (i.e. *assumptio carnis*) became the preferred way to speak of the mystery of the incarnation.[44] Self-consciously falling within this tradition, Owen wants to maintain a clear distinction between the idea of assumption and union.

By assumption, Owen means the "divine constitution of the person of Christ as God and man."[45] Prior to the assumption, the second person of the Trinity did not have a human nature. In other words, Christ does not change his "own nature or essence," nor is there a "transubstantiation of the divine nature into the human," nor should it be said that he ceased to be "what he was" prior to the incarnation.[46] Rather, the incarnation represents the second person of the Trinity becoming "what he was not, in taking our nature to his own, to be his own, whereby he dwelt among us."[47] Owen believed this truth is found in scripture.

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[43] For example, it may be argued that the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw both extremes emphasized to the neglect of the other. Late nineteenth century 'liberal' Protestant theologians often capitulated to the intellectual rules of the Enlightenment and thus tended to focus almost exclusively on the historical Jesus' ethics – in the process they often became vulnerable to the charge of virtually denying his divine nature (e.g., preexistence, ascension, etc.). Albercht Ritschl (1822-1889) is arguably such an example. Cf. Alister E. McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology: From the Enlightenment to Pannenberg* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 55-58; Haz Schwarz, *Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998)187-89. On the other hand, evangelicals eagerly engaged in apologetics to prove the deity of Jesus. In so doing they oftentimes neglected to emphasize the true humanity of Jesus. For recent critiques of this historical tendency, see Nigel M. De S. Cameron, *Complete in Christ: Rediscovering Jesus and Ourselves* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, rpt. 1997), esp. ch. 1; N. T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus: Rediscovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1999), 24-25. Both over-reactions risk failing to maintain the Chalcedonian dual emphasis.

[44] Cf. Muller, *DLGTT*, 48, 152-153.

[45] *Works*, 1: 224.

[46] *Works*, 1: 46.

[47] *Works*, 1: 46-47. Cf. Gregory of Nazianzen, "Oration 29," in vol. 7, *NPNF2*, §XIX: "What He was He continued to be; what He was not He took to Himself."

When the Bible refers to the *divine* nature in the person of Jesus Christ, it stresses the *activity* of the "nature assuming," whereas when it refers to the *human* nature – often *passively* – it stresses "the nature assumed."[48] Owen will later conclude that the scriptures move freely between the two natures of the person of Christ. While this freedom of movement is often confusing to the reader of the biblical texts, Owen offers four observations to help explain this difficulty.[49]

First, scripture sometimes makes "enunciations" that are "verified with respect unto one nature only."[50] Examples he cites of this include: John 1:1, "the Word was with God, and the Word was God;" John 8:58, "Before Abraham was, I am;" Hebrews 1:3, "Upholding all things by the word of his power." While all of these texts refer to the person of Christ, they "belong unto it on account of his divine nature." Other scriptures speaking of the person of Christ are "verified in human nature only," and only by this means can they be attributed unto the person of Christ: Isaiah 9:6, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given;" Isaiah 53:3, "A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Second, there are references in the scriptures that concern the person of Christ, but belong "not distinctly and originally unto either nature" but refer to the hypostatic union of the two. In this category Owen includes all theological ideas of Christ as prophet, priest, king, and head of the Church. He gives no biblical examples, apparently assuming this would be an obvious deduction for his readers.[51] Third, Owen believes that there are times in scripture when Christ's person is "denominated from one nature, the properties and act of the other are assigned unto it." This is in many ways similar to the first point, which becomes clearer when we observe Owen's scriptural illustrations. For example, when scripture refers to those who "crucified the Lord of Glory," Owen believes Jesus' Lordship is solely a result of his divine nature, whereas his crucifixion was only of the human nature. Likewise, he cites Acts 20:28, which he believes clearly demonstrates this biblical tendency to combine the two: "*God* purchased his church 'with *his own*

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[48] *Works*, 1: 224. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa on this point, who believed that "the flesh was the passive, the Logos the active" in the assumption (he speaks of 'mingling', ἀνάκρασις), Kelly, 299. Owen's discussion here shows remarkable similarity to Gregory of Nyssa, who maintains that with the "historical Jesus" one can still distinguish the two natures. Kelly is summing up Gregory of Nyssa, *Eunom.* 3,3; 3,4. Cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, Kelly, 306-7.

[49] Cf. *WCF* 8.7, which contains the core of Owen's presentation. Compare Zwingli on this with his discussion of ἀλλοίωσις (i.e., transfer or exchange) in *RR*, 204-5.

[50] For these four points, see *Works*, 1: 234-235.

[51] Cf. The *WCF* ch. 8.1 and the *WLC* Q./A. 42, which similarly groups these descriptions together to describe Christ as the Mediator.

blood.'"[52] Reflecting Cyril of Alexandria's understanding of the 'Communication of Idioms' (i.e., *Antidosis Idiomatum*), Owen explains his meaning: "The denomination of the person is from the divine nature only – he is God; but the act ascribed unto it, or what he did by his own blood, was of the human nature only. But the purchase that was made thereby was the work of the *person* as both God and man."[53] As we will explain below, Owen can make these fine distinctions because he differentiates between assumption and union from the outset. Finally, the scriptures often speak of "the person denominated from one nature, that is ascribed unto it which is common unto both; or else being denominated from both, that which is proper unto one only is ascribed unto him."[54]

In his complex formulation Owen believes that he provides his readers with a synopsis not only of the biblical data, but also of the patristic understanding of these dilemmas.[55] For our purposes, we need simply observe the shape of Owen's attempt to maintain the integrity of the two natures of Christ. While the New Testament may at first seem to present conflicting data concerning Jesus Christ – sometimes referring to him as God, sometimes as human, sometimes as uniting the two, etc. – Owen believes that a robust theological conception of the *person* of Christ adequately allows for this flexibility. Problems arise when theologians, such as Nestorius,[56] emphasize one element of the scriptural truth to the neglect of the other. Only by preserving the

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[52] *Works*, 1: 235. Emphasis mine. Cf. *Works*, 9: 590. Wolfhart Pannenberg's discussion of Luther's approach as later expressed in the Formula of Concord provides interesting background, *Systematic Theology: Volume 2*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 388-9. Pannenberg summarizing Luther writes: "scripture ascribes to the deity all that happens to the humanity and vice versa. If so, then we must say that the person suffers. But the person is true God; therefore we may rightly say that the Son of God suffers. For although the one part (if we may speak thus) does not suffer as deity, nevertheless the person, who is God, suffers in the other part as humanity."

[53] *Works*, 1: 235. Emphasis mine. See St Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*, trans. John Anthony McGuckin (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995, org. 438), 44-5.

[54] His proof-texts for this are Rom. 9:5 and Matt 22: 42. The meaning Owen intends his readers to glean from these texts seems somewhat obscure.

[55] Owen acknowledges the fathers used different language, such as "alteration" (ἐνάλλαψη), "permutation" (ἀλλοίωσις), "communion" (κοινότης), "the manner of mutual position" (τρόπος ἀντίδοσεως), and "the communication of properties" (κοινωνία ἰδίωματων). *Works*, 1: 235.

[56] For Owen's interaction with and responses to Nestorius' presumed position, see *Works*, 1: 231-32. Modern scholarship has shown that the traditional view that Nestorius rejected the two natures – a view started by the attacks of Cyril of Alexandria – is probably inaccurate. See Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition, Vol. 1: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon* , trans. John Bowdey (London: Mowbrays, 2nd ed. 1975), 443-63. This reassessment has been spurred on by the discovery of *Book of Heracleides*, which current scholarship believes Nestorius wrote. In this book one finds a clear affirmation of the two natures of Christ in almost Chalcedonian terms. Obviously Owen was unaware of this text and so writes within the accepted tradition of his day.

whole person of Jesus Christ can one maintain the proper distinctions and unity of the divine and human natures.

Returning to the more specific language of assumption, we see how Owen believes this language protects the distinction and unity of the two natures. Since the divine nature is immutable and impassible, Owen sees that the *assumption* proved to be the only way for the incarnation to occur, otherwise the divine would have to cease to be divine by becoming human. As a result, the second person of the Trinity who was not man "was made flesh as man, in that he took our human nature to be his own."[57]

Developing the idea of the assumption again prompts Owen to return to his Trinitarian conception. Because the incarnation was an outward act of the divine nature, it involved every person of the Trinity: the Father "as unto authoritative designation" by sending his Son; the Holy Spirit peculiarly acted "as unto the formation of the human nature"; and the Son acted uniquely "as unto the term of the assumption," since he himself took on human nature.[58] Each divine person executes an action "peculiar" to that person. Having given this perspective, Owen instantly clarifies that only in the assumption is there an "immediate act of the divine on the human in the person of the Son." This proves to be an essential point in Owen's attempt at presenting a truly human Jesus rather than some divinized man – an alien to the realities of normal human suffering and temptations. Before further developing this discussion of Jesus' humanity we must clarify Owen's distinction between assumption and union.

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[57] *Works*, 1: 225.

[58] Interestingly, whereas he cites biblical texts to prove his points for the Father and Spirit, regarding the Son he cites the "Damascen" (i.e., John of Damascus) who likewise argued: "the other persons had no concurrence [in the assumption], but only κατά Βούλησιν καὶ εὐδοκίαν – 'by counsel and approbation.'" *Works*, 1: 225.

A chart may provide the most direct way to unpack the distinctions Owen makes.

Assumption	Hypostatic Union
immediate act of divine nature	*mediate*, by virtue of that assumption
unto personality – Son of God and human nature become one person	*relation* of natures *subsisting* in that one person
Divine nature *active*, the human nature is *passive*: *one assumeth, the other assumed.*	*Mutual relation* of the natures

The importance here for Owen is that *initially* the action is entirely God's. There is no way in which humanity is said to become divine, no possibility of the divine nature "assumed as the human is."[59] This prevents any form of adoptionism from entering into Owen's Christology. God's great condescension comes in the incarnation, and so while Owen is diligent to maintain the true humanity of the person of Jesus Christ, he begins by claiming that there would be *no human nature* without divine assumption in the first place. Although the theologian must be careful to protect the "mutual relation" that exists between the divine and human natures in the person of Christ, he must first appreciate the immediate divine action which took place in the assumption of the human nature.[60] Only by divine desire and activity does the second person of the Trinity become truly human, and thus allow for the renewal of the rest of humanity. Here Owen's theological method is clearly working 'from above,' but in so doing he seeks to preserve the true identification between Jesus and the rest of humankind.[61]

Preaching the Assumption

In 1681, just two years before his death, Owen preached a short sermon on Philippians 2:5-8, in which he explained to his listeners both the mystery and

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[59] *Works*, 1: 226.

[60] Cf. *Works* 20: 367: the "hypostatical union could be no reward of obedience, being that which exceeds all the order of things and rules of remunerative justice. The assumption . . . of our nature . . . was an act of mere free, sovereign, unconceivable grace. And this is the foundation of all the following fruits of God's regard unto us." He continues, "Whatever God doth for us in and by Jesus Christ as made man for us . . . [must] be all of grace, because his being made man was so."

[61] Cf. John Macquarrie, "Christology without Incarnation? Some Critical Comments," in *The Truth of God Incarnate,* ed. Michael Green (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), 143, lists three points essential to the idea of incarnation, revealing the continued relevance of Owen's orthodox reasoning: 1) "initiative is from God and not from man," 2) "God is deeply involved in his creation," 3) "the centre of this initiative and involvement is Jesus Christ."

application to be drawn from the divine assumption of human nature.[62] The mature Owen reviews the ideas noted above, communicating profound and complex theology in order that his listeners might ultimately experience spiritual comfort. Although those discussing Owen's Christology often overlook this obscure sermon, it is an excellent illustration of Owen's anthroposensitivity; he moves easily from profound theological reflection to practical existential application.

In "The Humiliation and Condescension of Christ," Owen first asserts that fallen humanity could not save itself from sin. Yet, even God himself could not be the mediator needed for the redemption and reconciliation of humanity, for "a mediator must be a middle person, and God in his divine nature is one," which disqualifies him.[63] So if humanity remained impotent, and the divine nature was unable to act as mediator, there was only one possibility left – *that perfect God should assume human nature unto himself.* However, Owen confesses that the mediator could not be a *mere* human exalted to divine status: "The most glorious exaltation that a creature can have brings him not one step nearer the essence of God than a worm; for between that which is infinite and that which is not infinite there is no proportion." God is completely self-sufficient in his own "blessedness and eternal satisfaction," and so the incarnation must primarily be viewed in terms of a loving divine act rather than an abstract metaphysical necessity. By framing the dilemma and answer in this way Owen again seeks to emphasize the divine action behind the incarnation. Accordingly, the incarnation seems incredible in light "of that infinite distance which is between his nature, being, and essence, and the nature, being, and essence of any creature of any kind."[64] God alone may receive the title of an "infinite Being," whereas, in comparison, all creation seems to be "nothing."[65] For some reason, according to Owen, this Being who dwells in eternity and needs nothing takes action

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[62] The sermon is titled, "The Humiliation and Condescension of Christ," and is found in *Works*, 17: 561-569 (*BE*, 16: 493-501). All quotes in this section come from this sermon, unless otherwise indicated. This sermon, preached in 1681, is extremely similar to chapter IV of *The Glory of Christ*, which would have been something Owen was working on during this same time, though not published until after his death (1684). See *Works*, 1: 322-333.

[63] Cf. *Works*, 1: 323.

[64] Cf. *Works*, 12: 286.

[65] Here Owen's language of "nothing" (i.e., אַיִן) refers back to in Isaiah 40:17. Cf. *Works*, 1: 324. Elsewhere when he describes humanity and creation as "nothing" he is clearly borrowing his language from Canticles: fallen humanity is "miserable... less than vanity, and nothing." See *Works*, 20: 352-53. Cf. also Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.25.

toward humanity. As we will see in chapter five, the reason can only be explained by God's love.

God humbled himself from the realms of heaven to the realm of earth.[66] Where God is completely self-sufficient, humanity is completely dependent. All of creation depends ultimately on God. Showing how serious he is about the true humanity of Christ, Owen even claims that "the top of the creation, the flower, the glory of it, is the human nature of Christ; yet is it not self-sufficient. It *eternally lives in dependence* on God and *by communications* from the divine nature."[67] In this way, the assumption of human nature by the second person of the Trinity displays the ultimate condescension: the Son does not simply come down from the heavens to "look upon and behold us, and act kindly towards us," but actually "took our nature upon him to be his own!" For Owen, this self-humiliation is the "centre, life, and soul, of religion, the main rock of which the church is built."

To speak more directly on what Owen believes about the human nature of Christ, we need to understand what he believes *does not* occur in the incarnation. In the condescension the Son does "not leave" nor does he "relinquish" or "forego" his divine nature. More simply, "he did not cease to be God when he became man."[68] So strongly does Owen believe this and its practical significance that he allows himself to use difficult Trinitarian language and ideas in his sermon to communicate the wonder of the incarnation. His Trinitarian theology prevents him from setting up the three persons in opposition to one another or in levels of importance: "for though there is an order in the persons of the Trinity, there is no distinction or inequality in the nature of God. Every one who is partaker of that nature is equal in that nature, in dignity, power, and authority. This was the state of Christ."[69] Compromising on this point would inevitably jeopardize his doctrine of God with negative implications for various other doctrines (e.g., creation, providence).

Elsewhere in Owen's corpus he maintains this position through his teaching of what is commonly called *extra calvinisticum*.[70] He argues that Christ not only came

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[66] Cf. *Works*, 12: 286-7.

[67] Emphasis mine. Cf. *Works*, 1: 325.

[68] *Works*, 17: 564 (*BE*, 16: 496).

[69] *Works*, 17: 565 (*BE*, 16: 497).

[70] The quotations for the rest of this paragraph come from *Works*, 1: 92-93. For historical background on *extra calvinisticum* see, Muller, *DLGTT*, 111. Muller rightly argues that for Reformed theologians, as against the Lutherans, "the Word is fully united to but never totally contained within the human nature and, therefore, even in incarnation is to be conceived of as beyond or outside of (extra)

"down from heaven," but that he also "still continued in heaven." To say otherwise proposes that there was a period of time when Christ was not holding the universe together.[71] But since Christ is always in the heavens in the "glory and essence of his divine nature," by assuming human nature "he alone is meet and able to be the prophet of the church in the revelation of the heavenly mysteries of the counsels of the will of God." This does not mean Owen infuses divine attributes (omniscience, infinite wisdom, knowledge, and understanding) into the humanity of Christ. Rather, his human nature "was and is a creature, finite and limited"; in other words, it was incapable of "properties absolutely infinite and immense." This apparent Christological difficulty is resolved by Owen's strong pneumatology; the Spirit unites the divine and human natures in the person of Christ, uniquely filling his human nature with the Spirit beyond measure, as "a fulness like that of light in the sun, or of water in the sea."[72] Without developing a pneumatological discussion at this point, we must simply note that Owen's conception of the person of Christ allows him to maintain the initial and continued divine action of the second person of the Trinity while also preserving a realistic view of Jesus' humanity.[73]

Returning to Owen's sermon, it likewise claims that the incarnation should *not* be presented as the absorption or confusion of the two natures.[74] The divine does not absorb the human, for to do so would lead to a humanity which "is of no affinity and cognition unto us; not derived of Adam as we" – an error Owen thinks the Arians committed. Likewise, it is equally devastating to combine or confuse the two natures. When this confusion of natures occurs the result is a single nature which is "neither that divine nature that was originally and eternally, nor human nature, but another, a third nature, made in time." Owen wants to protect the essential continuity between the humanity of Jesus and that of his listeners – a goal which likewise protects him from several early Christological heresies. Here again, his explanation of the person

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the human nature." For more background see David E. Willis, *Calvin's Catholic Christology: The Function of the so-called Extra-Calvinisticum in Calvin's Theology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966).

[71] Cf. Owen, *Summary of Doctrinal and Practical Observations, Drawn from the Exposition of the Epistle* [to the Hebrews], *Works*, 19: 462. Commenting on Heb., 1: 3 he writes: "Such is the nature and condition of the universe, that it could not subsist a moment, nor could any thing in it act regularly unto its appointed end, without the continual support, guidance, influence, and disposal, of the Son of God himself."

[72] *Works*, 2: 61.

[73] *Extra Calvinisticum* was commonly agreed upon by Puritan theologians. Cf. Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983, orig. 1692 in *A Body of Practical Divinity*), 163: "Is God the Father omnipresent? So is Christ. 'The Son of Man which is in heaven.' John iii.13. Christ as God was then in heaven, when as man he was upon the earth."

of Christ allows him to make these technical distinctions. For while the divine nature never hungered, thirsted, and wept, his human nature surely did. In such instances the divine nature acts only in the "sustentation" of the human nature.[75]

Finally, in typical anthroposensitive form, Owen seeks to apply these weighty truths to the lives of his listeners. The Christian should receive the truths of this great condescension primarily through admiration. Yet more than just praise from the believer's lips, the idea of the condescension of the Son assuming human nature should inspire comfort. Building from Isaiah 8:14 which prophesies of one who shall be a "sanctuary" to some and a cause for the stumbling of others, Owen moves to 1 Peter 2:6-8, which also refers to a "sanctuary" for believers and for the oppressed.[76] In both instances Owen thinks the reference is clearly pointing to Jesus who, through his humiliation, became both a sanctuary and a "stone of stumbling." Believers are not those who stumble, but those who find in the incarnate one a sanctuary: "freedom from danger, deliverance out of trouble, and a supply of all their wants."[77] The only thing a believer must do is go to the sanctuary for such relief. To go to anyone or anywhere else besides Christ shows the believers failure to grasp "his will and his power." The aged and experienced pastor-scholar pleads with his congregation and apparently even with himself:

> If he be willing and if he be able, you have no ground to question but you shall have relief. I know how it is with us all. We have all wants, we have all temptations, we have all fears, we have all inward conflicts and perplexities, more or less; and we all secretly groan to be delivered from all these things. Groaning is the best of our spiritual life, –to live in continual groaning. . . .
>
> Where shall we betake ourselves, then, for relief in all cases? If any one have will and power to relieve us, oh, that he would come in to our relief and help; thither would we go! But here is the loss of our souls and peace, here is that which keeps us at such a poor, low rate, and makes us scramble for the world,–because we neglect going unto Christ for relief in all our wants. How few of us live in the exercise of faith for this purpose! 'But will he relieve me?' *Why, he hath humbled, emptied himself, and laid aside his glory, for this very end, that he might relieve us.* For my own part, I do verily believe that all coming short of gospel joy, strength, and power, is for want of due

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[74] We pick up his argument in Works, 17: 565 ff. (*BE*, 16: 497 ff.).
[75] *Works*, 17: 566 (*BE*, 16: 498).
[76] Cf. *Works*, 1: 330-33.
[77] *Works*, 17: 568 (*BE*, 16: 500).

> application unto Jesus Christ for relief. . . . Why, can I give you greater encouragement than I do?[78]

The Son of God who assumed human nature has provided the ultimate sanctuary for a weak and weary humanity, and it is to this sanctuary that Owen points his flock. Owen's life-long Christological explorations only make sense to him in light of the comfort these ideas can bring to ordinary Christians. Though a difficult truth, the complexity of the person of Jesus with two natures is essential, not simply for abstract theological reasons, but also for practical devotional living. These are not truths to be kept within the academy, but rather to be preached from the pulpit. This incarnate one proclaimed by Owen could bring such relief to believers precisely because he assumed a true human nature, and, as such, became a sympathetic high priest.

We focus our attention in this final section on the continuities and discontinuities between Christ's humanity and that of the rest of humankind. According to Owen, communion with God is possible only because Jesus is the same ('truly man') and yet distinct ('without sin') from the rest of humanity.

Christ's Humanity and Our Humanity

Same Human Composition

From very early in his career Owen applied his basic formulation of the *imago Dei* to Jesus. As a young pastor at the parish of Fordham in Essex, Owen decided to write two Catechisms (1645) – one for adults and the other for the instruction of children.[79] Our attention here is drawn specifically to chapter 10, question 5 of "The Greater [i.e., Adult] Catechism," which attempts to "prove" that Jesus was a "perfect man."[80] When Owen refers to Jesus as a "perfect man" in the catechism, perfect should be understood as meaning *whole* or *complete*, rather than simply sinless. His particular aim in this context is to demonstrate Jesus' true humanity, rather than his sinlessness. As we saw in our discussion of the *imago Dei*, Owen's default for

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[78] *Works*, 17: 568 (*BE*, 16: 500). Emphasis mine. Elsewhere Owen describes "groaning" as "[the expression of] a vehement desire, mixed with sorrow, for the present want of what is desired. The desire hath sorrow, and that sorrow hath joy and refreshment in it," *Works*, 1: 384.

[79] See *Works*, 1: 465-494. For background on Owen's ministry during this period, see Toon, *God's Statesman*, 17-19.

[80] For Owen's treatment of Jesus as 'perfect man,' see *Works*, 1: 479.

speaking of a human being is to apply basic faculty psychology categories. True to form, Owen displays this again in his Christology.

Jesus has a body and a soul.[81] He meets the requirements of a "perfect man" because his soul has a will, affections, and "endowments." His proof-text for the latter is Luke 2:52,[82] which was commonly used to point to Jesus' intellectual growth, and thus a reference to his mental faculties.[83] Additionally, Owen has his catechumens memorize that Jesus' human nature was subject to "general infirmities of nature."[84] In sum, a human must have a body and soul – the soul being the location of the mind, will, and affections. Just as we saw with the rest of humanity, Jesus must fit into these categories as well, otherwise his human nature is somehow alien and thus he cannot be a "fit and sufficient Saviour for men."[85] Following this basic format Owen believes he, in a great economy of words, has communicated to his congregation the simplest route to understanding the true humanity of Jesus.[86] Filling in the details of this thumbnail sketch requires interaction with the rest of Owen's corpus, to which we now turn.

A Sympathetic High Priest

Maintaining the true humanity of Christ proves essential in Owen's theology, since he believes that to compromise here would cause devastating soteriological results: in the words of the early fathers, "only what was assumed can be healed."[87]

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[81] *Works*, 1: 479.

[82] Luke 2: 52: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." KJV.

[83] E.g., Calvin, *Institutes*, II.14.2.

[84] Cf. *Works*, 19: 233.

[85] *Works*, 1: 479, *GC* ch. 10.6. It is also interesting to remember Owen's arguments against those who claim only a "drop" of Christ's blood was needed for redemption. If that were the case, argues Owen, why is the "whole" in fact shed? See *Works*, 20: 403, 407; cf., 2: 97.

[86] One sees an observable difference here between Owen's *GC* (1645) and Westminster Confession and Catechisms (completed in 1648). The *WCF*, *WLC*, and the *WSC* are much subtler in using faculty categories for describing the humanity of Jesus. Faculty language certainly appears in Westminster, but never so tightly and as clearly as Owen does in *GC* 10.5. See Appendix: "Comparing Westminster and John Owen on Anthropology (including Jesus' humanity)." For more background see Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c. 1530-1740* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

[87] See Gregory of Nazianzen, "To Cledonius the Priest against Apollinarius," *Epistolae* 101, in vol. 7, *NPNF2*: "For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole." It is noteworthy that portions of this text are often used to support the idea that Jesus assumed *sinful* flesh or a *fallen* human nature, a debate we will further note

We have already discussed Owen's view of assumption above; here we simply want to draw attention to the degree to which Owen stresses the continuity between the incarnate Christ and the rest of humanity. An illustration of this comes in Owen's observation regarding those who encountered Jesus in first century Israel. Not only did they fail to recognize Jesus as God, but they also did not "look on him as a good man."[88] The reason for this was that Jesus was "no less a man than any of themselves were." In fact, they so strongly believed in his humanity that they wanted to stone him because he – clearly being a human – also claimed to be God.[89] Noteworthy is the fact that a text which is commonly used to prove the deity of Jesus – based on his self-disclosure – is used by Owen as testimony to Jesus' humanity!

In Jesus people saw a man just like themselves. Looking at this carpenter they beheld a man whose experiences seemed similar to their own. This can be seen most clearly in Owen's summation of Jesus' sufferings and temptations. For example, Owen writes of the incarnate Son who "had the heart of a man, the affections of a man, and that in the highest degree of sense and tenderness. Whatever sufferings the soul of a man may be brought under, by grief, sorrow, shame, fear, pain, danger, loss, by any afflictive passions within or impressions of force from without, he underwent, he felt it all."[90] Jesus' sorrows were not only like those common to humanity, but far more intense. He did not hide from difficulties and suffering, but "laid open his soul that they might soak into the inmost parts of it."[91] The result of this openness to human pain meant that Jesus "left nothing, in the whole nature of sorrow or suffering, that he tasted not and made experience of."[92] Earlier Owen wrote of Jesus:

> his participation of their nature was that which brought him into such a condition as wherein it was needful for him to put his trust in God, and to look for deliverance from him in a time of danger . . . *which could not in any sense have been said of Christ had he not been partaker of that nature*, which

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below. Depending on how one defines 'fallen' will determine if one reads Gregory as positing a fallen nature or not.

[88] *Works*, 17: 566 (*BE*, 16: 498).

[89] *Works*, 17: 566 (*BE*, 16: 498). He is referring here to John 8:58 and John 10:33. Cf. *Works*, 20: 357, where Owen argues that the Jews struggled to accept the Messiah in this "low and mean and despised condition."

[90] *Works*, 20: 484. Note that by "afflictive passions within" Owen *does not* mean sinful cravings stemming from a compromised human nature, otherwise his theology would be remarkably inconsistent. See below for further discussion.

[91] *Works*, 20: 484. Later he adds, "All the advantage that he had above us by the excellency of his person, was only that the sorrows of his heart were enlarged thereby, and he was made capable of greater enduring without sin," *Works*, 20: 485.

[92] *Works*, 20: 485.

> is exposed unto all kinds of wants and troubles, with outward straits and oppositions, which the nature of angels is not.[93]

To be made "of the same nature" involves facing temptations, and this is the root of much of Jesus' sufferings.[94] Temptations in and of themselves are neutral, "of an indifferent nature," and thus to be tempted does not imply a moral evil.[95] But here we see the first difference between Christ's human nature and that of the rest of humanity. All of Christ's various temptations "were all external, and by impressions from without," although Owen qualifies his statement by noting that they do not all come from Satan.[96] Below we will discuss in greater detail why Owen must make this distinction between internal and external temptation. For now we need simply observe that Owen believes Jesus faced *continual temptation*, especially during his years of ministry.

Four particular areas of temptations emerge.[97] First, regarding Jesus' "state and condition in the world." Although Jesus endured the continual temptation "cheerfully" for the sake of those whom he would save and preserve as their high priest, nevertheless his experiences were real and painful: "hunger, poverty, weariness, sorrow, reproach, shame, contempt; wherewith his holy soul was deeply affected."[98] Second, he faced particular temptations as a result of different relationships: his immediate family who did not believe and thus rejected him; his common followers who forsook his preaching; his close disciples who left and denied him; his recognition of the "anguish" experienced by his mother as a result of his sufferings; and his various enemies who in one way or another worked against the gospel. Third, Satan was involved in tempting Jesus with a unique intensity. Fourth, "God's desertion of him was another temptation under which he suffered." Throughout his life Jesus exercised his faith as one relating rightly to God, even during the great temptation experienced on the cross where he cries out as one forsaken: there was a "terrible conflict in the human nature," but the person of Christ

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[93] *Works*, 20: 419. Emphasis mine.

[94] Cf. *Works*, 20: 418: Jesus and believers "are of the same nature, of one mass, of one blood." Cf. *Works*, 20: 420.

[95] *Works*, 20: 477.

[96] *Works*, 20: 478.

[97] These temptations are all discussed in *Works*, 20: 478.

[98] Cf. *Works* 2: 135. Cf. Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration 29," (vol. 7 in NPNF2), §XX: "He was tempted as Man, but He conquered as God; yea, He bids us be of good cheer, for He has overcome the world."

faithfully trusted the Father throughout.[99] Enduring these and other difficulties was only possible for the Son who assumed "the frail nature of man" by his constant looking to the Father for assistance, just as everyone else is called to do.[100]

Christ's temptations do not simply attest to the true humanity of Jesus, but also to the relationship that exists between him and those for whom he suffered. He underwent these things so that believers might not only be reconciled to God, but also that they might have strength in time of temptation.[101] Here again Owen's anthroposensitivity breaks through; Jesus faced temptations not simply to conform to an abstract criteria by which he can be considered truly human, but he faces temptations that he might overcome them and bring strength to his people.[102] Elsewhere Owen lists some of the horrific troubles and tribulations that believers may experience, and yet he attempts to draw his readers attention away from their own struggles and onto the one who "comes in the midst of all this confusion and says, 'Surely these are my brethren, the children of my Father.' . . . And this is a stable foundation of comfort and supportment in every condition."[103] The assumption of a human nature provides the foundation for comfort to the believer.

Yet Without Sin...

While Owen wholeheartedly argues that the Son incarnate was truly human, his human nature may be distinguished from the rest of fallen humanity. Owen maintains the corruption of human nature resulting from the fall, and yet the human nature of Jesus is free from this original sin, and as such there is "no small distance" between his human nature and that of the rest of humanity. "Human nature," he argues, "defiled with sin is farther distanced from the *same nature* as pure and holy, in worth and excellency, than the meanest worm is from the most glorious angel."[104] Yet while Christ's human nature is uncorrupted by the fall, it is still "the same nature." Having a nature like his brethren, while on earth Jesus was "obnoxious to sufferings and death itself;" yet Owen argues that this truth should always be held alongside the

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[99] See *Works*, 9: 530-384, 587.
[100] *Works*, 19: 93-94.
[101] *Works*, 20: 479.
[102] For the development of this line of his thinking, see *Works*, 20: 479 ff.
[103] *Works*, 20: 423-24.
[104] *Works*, 20: 421. Emphasis mine.

idea that Christ remains, "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners."[105] Jesus assumes an unblemished human nature in a fallen world, although he never boasts in or abuses this difference.[106]

It is at this point that Jesus acts as the second Adam, the federal head of those who would believe. Whereas the first Adam represented all of humankind, the second Adam represents believers.[107] According to Owen and common seventeenth century reformed theology, acting in a unique federal (foedus) relationship Jesus can fully assume a human nature while not having to assume a nature bound by original sin.[108] So for example, when Owen argues elsewhere that the incarnate Christ is free from original sin, he describes two aspects of this reality as being 1) the 'guilt of the first sin' and 2) the 'derivation of a polluted, corrupted nature' coming from Adam.[109] Since Christ was never "federally in Adam," he cannot be counted guilty as the rest of humanity. Because all of humanity was in covenant with Adam as the first federal head, when he sinned all sinned (omnes eramus unus ille homo); yet Christ serves as the unique federal head for believers: thus, Adam's guilt does not apply to Jesus personally. Owen does not deny that Christ as Mediator was made sin (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21), but he stresses that this was voluntary and not the legal imputation from

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[105] *Works*, 19: 215. Cf. Heb. 7:26. Owen later adds: "We are obnoxious unto these things on our own account, he only on ours."

[106] Cf. *Works*, 20: 422: "He says not, with those proud hypocrites in the prophet, 'Stand farther off, I am holier than you;' but he comes unto us, and takes us by the hand in his love, to deliver us from this condition."

[107] For comparisons between the first and second Adam, see e.g., *Works*, 5: 323-29; 10: 391-92; 22: 390. For sample discussions of covenant (foedus), see *Works*, 17: 157 ff. (*BT*, 205 ff.); 19: 77-97.

[108] For classic representations of seventeenth century federal theology see Johannes Cocceius, *Summa doctrinæ de fœdere et testamentis Dei* (1648) and Herman Witsius, *The Oeconomy of the Covenants between God and Man.*, trans. William Crookshank, 3 vols. (London: 1763). Among the vast literature – and debate about – the history of federal theology see Barth, *CD*, 4:1, 50-66; Lyle D. Bierma, "Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?," *WTJ* 45 (1983): 304-21; idem, "Law and Grace in Ursinus' Doctrine of the Natural Covenant: A Reappraisal," in Carl R. Truman and R. S. Clark, eds. *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 96-110; Bobick; A. T. B. McGowan, *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston*, ed. David F. Wright and Donald Macleod, *Rutherford Studies in Historical Theology* (Edinburgh: Paternoster, 1997); C. S. McCoy, "Johannes Cocceius: Federal Theologian," *SJT* 16 (D 1963):352-70; Hermon Heppe, "Die Foederaltheologie der Reformirten Kirche," in *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der Reformierten Kirche* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879), 204-240; Perry Miller, "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity" in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: HUP, 1956), 48-98; Jens G. Møller, "The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology," *JEH* 14 (1963): 46-67; Stephen Strehle, *Calvinism, Federalism, and Scholasticism: A Study of the Reformed Doctrine of Covenant* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1988); David N. J. Poole, *The Covenant Approach to the Ordo Salutis* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1995); John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); Wong.

[109] *Works*, 2: 64.

Adam's covenant.[110] Distinguishing between being in Adam *naturally* (which he affirms of Christ's humanity) and *legally* (which he denies), Owen declares that the incarnate Christ acting as a second Adam singly fulfills the covenant of works – being victorious where Adam failed. Regarding the pollution of Christ's human nature, Owen follows the common Reformed understanding that the Spirit's role in Jesus' unique conception preserved him from any personal corruption.[111]

Recent theological criticism of this older federal theology has argued that such a view inevitably portrays the Son assuming a generic human nature. Such recent criticism not only tends to downplay federal theology, but also affirm that the Son assumed "fallen" or "sinful flesh."[112] In other words – the argument proceeds – if the Son does not assume a *fallen* human nature from the line of postlapsarian Adam, the nature assumed is not really like any other human nature since the first Adam, and thus the incarnate Christ would be unable to redeem humans. A significant problem arises when such terms as *fallen* and *unfallen* are employed, since even in recent

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[110] *Works*, 2: 65. For Owen's short discourse on 2 Cor. 5: 21, see *Works*, 9: 521-23.

[111] *Works*, 2: 65. Kelly M. Kapic, "The Son's Assumption of a Human Nature: A Call for Clarity," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 3: 2 (2001), 160-63.

[112] 'Sinful flesh' is biblical language (Rom. 8:3) and openly acknowledged by all; the question of whether this implies a fallen or unfallen nature has been hotly debated. This debate originally surfaced with the writings of Edward Irving (1792-1834) who used provocative language when he posited that Jesus took unto himself a fallen human nature. See his *The Doctrine of the Incarnation Opened in Six Sermons* (London, 1828); *The Orthodox and Catholic Doctrine of our Lord's Human Nature* (London, 1830); *The Opinions Circulating Concerning our Lord's Human Nature* (London, 1830), and *Christ's Holiness in Flesh* (Edinburgh, 1831). See also Graham W. P. McFarlane, *Christ and the Spirit: The Doctrine of the Incarnation according to Edward Irving* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996). Other prominent theologians to affirm a similar position include Barth, *CD*, 1: 2, esp. 147-159, Cf. *CD* 2:1, 397-98; J. B. Torrance, "The Vicarious Humanity of Christ," in *The Incarnation*, ed. T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1981), 141; idem, *Worship, Community and The Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 53, 56, 87, 105; T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 161-68. Two contemporary critics of the fallen view include Philip E. Hughes, *The True Image: The Origin and Destiny of Man in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 125-35, pp. 213-23; Donald Macleod, *The Person of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), esp. pp. 221-30.

A recent work by a Catholic theologian, Thomas Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh: An Essay on the Humanity of Christ* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), attempts to give both historical and biblical reasons for affirming that Jesus assumed "sinful flesh." Interestingly, in the preface the Protestant theologian Colin Gunton recommends the book for the most part, with an intriguing qualification: "A theologian of the Reformed tradition might well want to put some of this rather differently, and while welcoming the use made of the theology of the great Edward Irving – surely a modern pioneer of this approach – I would also point to its anticipation in the thought of the Puritan, John Owen," x.

While we do not have space to interact with this contemporary debate here, it seems clear that Owen's understanding and emphasis on the true humanity of Jesus Christ may offer both careful and creative insights into better appreciating this area of Christology. To date the closest Owen scholarship has come to addressing this contemporary problem in light of Owen's thought comes from Spence, "Incarnation and Inspiration," though this is still several steps away from addressing this particular question. For a review of this dissertation and Spence's other published work, see chapter one.

debate there continues to be confusion over what exactly this vocabulary conveys, particularly when applied to Jesus. Even those who agree that the Son assumed a fallen nature do not agree as to what that designation includes and excludes. For example, some agree Christ's human nature included concupiscence, while others reject the idea but still believe he assumed a fallen nature. Since we have dealt with this more contemporary debate elsewhere,[113] our purpose here is to better understand Owen's conclusions by exploring his reasoning.

Displaying concerns similar to both patristic and modern theologians Owen boldly claims that "for a *sinning nature* to be saved, it was indispensably necessary that *it* should be assumed."[114] The question becomes, what does "it" refer to? Does Owen imply by such a statement that Jesus assumed a fallen human nature, or should he be understood as claiming that "it" refers simply to human nature without the predicate "sinning"? Contextually Owen is arguing for the idea that the Son assumed a human rather than angelic nature, otherwise humanity would be unredeemable. Stated another way, since the Son did not assume an angelic nature the result was that those who "sinned in that [angelic] nature must perish for ever."[115] As noted above, only by assuming a human nature – the same essential nature common to all humanity – could the Son accomplish his work. Those, like the Socinians, who believe that sinners could be saved any other way "but by satisfaction made in the nature that had sinned, seem not to have considered aright the nature of sin and the justice of God."[116] As a result, they undervalue the purity of the earthly Christ.[117] Following Owen's thought, the Son clearly needed to assume a true human nature as the federal head. Yet to suppose by deduction that therefore Jesus assumes 'fallen' nature is to misunderstand the virgin birth, life of Christ and, most significantly, his death. The following conclusions seem the most appropriate way to summarize Owen's thought: through the Spirit's work in the extraordinary virgin birth the Son assumes a sinless human nature,[118] lives a life of absolute faithfulness to God,[119] and uniquely, through

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[113] See Kapic, "The Son's Assumption," 154-66.

[114] *Works*, 20: 462. Emphasis mine.

[115] *Works*, 20: 462.

[116] *Works*, 20: 462. Cf. Alan W. Gomes, "De Jesu Christo Servatore: Faustus Socinus on the Satisfaction of Christ," *WTJ* 55 (Fall 1993): 209-31.

[117] See *Works*, 19: 214-15.

[118] E.g., *Works*, 12, 293: "'Whereas he was like men, namely, those first [i.e., Adam and Eve]; that is, without sin.' That Christ was without sin, that in his being made like to us there is an exception as to sin, is readily granted." A similar conclusion is reached by McGowan, 24-32, regarding Thomas Boston (1676-1732).

his passion, he was able to completely take upon himself the sin of others. Unlike the rest of humanity, the Son assumed a nature uncorrupted by original sin and thus resembling a prelapsarian Adam.[120] Like the rest of humanity, the person of Jesus lived in a fallen world and thus faced extreme pain and temptation utterly unknown to the first Adam – which allows Owen to speak of him taking on our general infirmities.[121] Thus we see not only continuity and discontinuity when comparing Jesus' human nature with others after the fall, but there is also continuity and discontinuity with Adam's nature prior to original sin. It is a mistake of oversimplification to say either 1) he assumed a prelapsarian human nature, which is completely alien and oblivious to the painful realities of a fallen world, or 2) he assumed a fallen human nature, just like ever other human except that he never engages in personal acts of sin. The Son's express purpose for his condescension was that he might come as the true and pure second Adam, able to redeem those who were lost.[122] As such, he could not avoid the pain of this world, but instead he voluntarily and graciously entered into suffering throughout his life, culminating in his death.[123]

Working within this system of federal theology, Owen might appear at odds with contemporary language which commonly describes the Son as assuming a *fallen* human nature. Yet, we see that he inadvertently answers one of the main objections that such a position implies. In opposition to the objection that the Son assumed a generic human nature, Owen appears to maintain both the universality and particularity of the human nature Jesus assumes. A lengthy quotation from Owen is necessary to capture this dynamic of his thought. Jesus

> did take 'upon' him (I use that word rather than take 'unto him') the nature of man, into an individual subsistence in his own person, whereby he became *that* man; and what was done and acted in it by *that* man was done and acted *by the person of the Son of God*. . . .

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[119] Cf. *Works*, 19: 153-54, 159, again possible only by the communication of the Spirit.

[120] *Works*, 19: 27: "the individual nature actually assumed into union was . . . considered as pure as in its first original and creation."

[121] *Works*, 19: 466-67. Owen makes a distinction between *natural* infirmities (which open one up to temptations and sufferings) and *sinful* infirmities. The Son assumes the former, not the latter, since Jesus needed to be both *without sin* and *tempted* in order to offer himself in the place of others. See *Works*, 19: 234.

[122] This element of Owen's theology may be compared to Irenaeus. As Gustaf Wingren keenly observes in his classic study, *Man and the Incarnation: A Study of the Biblical Theology of Irenaeus*, trans. Ross Mackenzie (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), for Irenaeus "sin is never in itself anything human, but on the contrary destruction of man as God made him. It is no limitation of Christ's humanity that He has no sin, but on the contrary His very freedom from sin qualifies him for achieving the thing which is truly human, but which no other human being is capable of doing, for the whole of humanity is bound, captive, and unnatural," 86-7.

[123] Cf. *Works*, 20: 430.

> *We have all of us the same nature in general*; –that is, the same specific human nature belongs unto us equally and unto all men in the world; *yet every man and woman hath this nature entire and absolutely unto himself, as if there were no other man or woman in the world.* And Adam was not more a single person when there was none in the world but himself, than every one of us is a single person now the world is full of men, as if there were but one man. And *every one comes into the world in his own individual subsistence unto himself*, whereby he becomes a man as much as any of us. *Here is the great act of self-denial in Christ.*[124]

The Son assumes a true human nature, both universal and particular. Owen does not claim that Jesus was an alien child who simply appeared from heaven; rather he unhesitatingly claims that Christ assumes a traceable lineage (e.g., 'seed of Abraham'),[125] acknowledging that Jesus was "a bud from the loins of sinful man."[126] Additionally, whereas those who are born by "ordinary generation" are "obnoxious unto all miseries" from their first breath, Jesus is not. Since he has not suffered from original sin, he is "just in himself, free from all, obnoxious to nothing that was grievous or irksome, no more than the angels in heaven or *Adam in paradise.*"[127] This constitutes the most significant difference between Jesus' particular human nature and the rest of humanity: he assumes a sinless human nature within a fallen world.

While we noted above Owen's willingness to express the perfect human nature of Jesus in faculty psychology terms, he never allows for the effects of original sin on Jesus' faculties as he does on the rest of humanity. This is what Owen means by making a distinction between internal and external temptations. Jesus' internal disposition resembles prelapsarian humanity rather than a corrupted postlapsarian disposition which naturally points away from God.[128] After the fall human nature suffers from the entrance of sin into the world: the mind becomes impotent and distorted, the will becomes opposed to the things of the Spirit, and the affections become confused and twisted.[129] Hence, when in an earlier work he argues against

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[124] *Works*, 16: 499. Emphasis mine.

[125] See *Works*, 20: 454-62. It is true, nonetheless, that while Owen uses this to draw attention to the true humanity of Jesus, he still stresses Jesus' relationship to the "spiritual" rather than the natural seed.

[126] See *Works*, 2: 64. Here Owen is defending Christ's humanity as being free from all sin, yet he shows the unusual situation from which this occurs. See chapter five where we discuss this particular passage.

[127] *Works*, 20: 422. Emphasis mine. Cf. Owen's claim noted earlier in footnote 105 that Jesus is 'obnoxious' or liable to suffering and death, but on 'our own account' rather than his own.

[128] See *Works* 2: 143: "It is true, there is something in all our temptations more than was in the temptation of Christ. There is something in ourselves to take part with every temptation; and there is enough in ourselves to tempt us, though nothing else should appear against us. With Christ it was not so, John xiv.30."

[129] See chapter two, "John Owen's Formulation of the *imago Dei*."

what he believes is the Arminian rejection of original sin, he concludes that humanity is thoroughly defiled: "all the distortures and distemperatures of the soul by lusts, concupiscence, passions, blindness of mind, perverseness of will, inordinateness of affects, wherewith we are pressed and turmoiled" are the result of original sin.[130] But these consequences of original sin do not extend to the human nature of Christ who was 'without sin.' While born of a fallen woman, Jesus possessed faculties uncorrupted by the fall. For this reason Jesus' virgin birth is important to Owen, who argues that "whereas the original contagion of sin is derived by natural procreation, had [Jesus] been by that means made partaker of human nature, how could he have been 'holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners,' as it became our high priest to be?"[131] In other words, Owen attempts not only to preserve the true humanity of Christ, but also his essential purity; he believes both are necessary for Jesus to qualify as the great high priest.[132] While he goes on to argue that Jesus' human nature needed to experience all the normal affections (e.g., love, joy, fear, sorrow, etc.), and his body needed to experience normal physical sufferings (e.g., hunger, thirst, cold, pain, death), Owen maintains that there remains a fundamental difference in human natures. Fallen humanity experiences these things now with "irregular perturbations" whereas Jesus does not internally experience these "inordinate inclinations" that others do as a result of "their tempers and complexions."[133] Whereas "most of our temptations arise from within us, from our own unbelief and lusts," this cannot be the case for him who knew no sin. Like pre-fallen humanity, Jesus' faculties were working correctly as his mind, will, and affections all pointed him toward the Father. While this should not be taken as implying that Jesus was not *truly and externally* tempted (cf. Adam and Eve in the garden who were tempted even before the fall), it does mean that from *internal* temptations "he was absolutely free; for as he had no inward disposition or inclination unto the least evil, being perfect in all graces and all their operations at all times, so

[130] Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, *Works*, 10: 79. Interestingly, Owen also adds the effects original sin has on the body, opening it up to disease and infirmities; he does not seem hesitant to apply these external consequences of original sin to the incarnate Christ.

[131] *Works*, 20: 467.

[132] Significantly, Owen does acknowledge that one of the requirements of the high priest is that he "must be taken from among men," *Works*, 20: 469.

[133] *Works*, 20: 467-68. Cf. *Works*, 3: 167.

when the prince of this world came unto him, he had no part in him, – nothing to close with his suggestions or to entertain his terrors."[134]

Given the significant difference described above, the idea of a sinless Jesus calling believers his brethren becomes all the more significant, since such alliance between himself and the rest of humanity "cost him" by making him "instantly obnoxious unto all miseries and the guilt whereof we had contracted upon ourselves."[135] This is what makes justification so crucial. For on the cross the unique theandric Jesus can now take on the sin of the world.

Conclusion

The second person of the Trinity assuming human nature proves to be pivotal in Owen's theological anthropology. It paves the way for an understanding of the depth of God's redemptive love which will enable the reconciliation between fallen humanity and a holy God. As we already discovered in chapter two, although humanity was created to commune with God, the fall disrupted this human experience. All of fallen humanity experiences the crushing weight of sin, and only by means of the incarnation does hope resurface: the chasm between the Creator and creature has been crossed in the Father's revelation of himself through his Son. Through the incarnation, humanity is uniquely confronted with the reality of a holy transcendent God whose loving immanence is set forth clearly in the Son. By the assumption the Son experienced a perfect or complete human nature which is like every other human nature – only sin excepted. As such, Jesus alone is able to take away the sin of the world. Through Christ alone does God clearly portray himself as 'for us.'

Only with this background in Owen's Christology can one proceed to discuss the ideas of justification and renewed communion with the Triune God. Without divine action, humanity would remain dead in their sins and without hope of ever enjoying fellowship with God. But in Christ the riches of divine love are discovered. Justification is not a possibility but an actuality for those who are found in Christ, and

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[134] *Works*, 20: 468. Cf. *Works*, 10: 85, describing humanity before the Fall: "there was no inclination to sin, no concupiscence of that which is evil, no repugnancy to the law of God, in the pure nature of man."

[135] *Works*, 20: 422.

through Christ they are enabled to worship the Triune God whose love made renewed relations a reality.

Chapter 4

Reconciling God and Humanity
Looking at the Question of Justification

"The great Work of them who are Embassadors for Christ, to beseech men in his stead, to be reconciled unto God, is to reveal the Will and Love of the Father, in making him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the Righteousness of God in him."[1]
JOHN OWEN (1653)

"For all our rest in this world is from trust in God; and the especial object of this trust, so far as it belongs unto the nature of that faith whereby we are justified, is 'God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.'"[2]
JOHN OWEN (1677)

Introduction

Many anthropological presuppositions are revealed by how one attempts to explain the reconciliation between a morally compromised human being and a perfectly righteous God. Writing a century and half after Luther's 'discovery' of God's righteousness in Romans 1:16-17, Owen finds himself compelled to enter into a renewed debate surrounding the doctrine of justification. By 1640 many ministers expressed concern at the growing laxity and 'coldness of heart' which they saw throughout England. During this time a strong reaction arose against those who appeared to minimize the role of good works.[3] Even leading orthodox theologians, such as William Twisse and Owen, found themselves labeled antinomian. In this turbulent context of the seventeenth century, Owen represents an English Reformed theologian of 'high orthodoxy' adding to the countless treatises already written on this subject. By specifically examining Owen's *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*

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[1] From Owen's preface to W. Eyre's, *Vindiciæ Justificationis Gratuitæ* (London, 1653). At this early date Owen adds a disclaimer, claiming ignorance regarding the persons and circumstances discussed in Eyre's work. In this context he also claims he is not yet ready, nor does he desire to present his own thoughts on the topic of justification; he waits twenty-five years before he writes his own extensive treatise on the subject.

[2] Owen, *Works*, 5: 101.

[3] C. F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (London, SPCK, 1966) nicely traces this development, specifically focusing on the central

(1677), written in the last decade of his life, we see how his methodology and conclusions reveal insights into his underlying anthropology.[4]

While a certain amount of historical background is necessary to appreciate fully Owen's emphases, this chapter – like the previous ones – will continue to focus primarily upon theological rather than historical observations. We will use justification as a topic by which to better understand how Owen's anthropology works itself out. In his prefatory comments, Owen makes a statement of intent that, though justification is hotly contested, he desires to avoid those debates as much as possible. Instead, he seeks to give a "naked inquiry" into those things "revealed in scripture, and as evidencing themselves in their power and efficacy on the minds of them that do believe."[5] While we recognize the impossibility of such a 'naked inquiry' – acknowledging various influences upon Owen's thought – our goal is to outline his own formulation.

Previous chapters have already discussed the foundational ideas of humanity as made in the image of God and the centrality of the incarnation in redemption; this chapter will build upon these ideas by exploring the question of the justification of believers. Since being made in God's image primarily points to relations with God, our concern naturally moves to the theme of justification. Particular attention in this chapter will be given to Owen's continued dual emphasis on Christology and praxis, for in this manner we continue to observe how his anthropology affects the rest of his theological conclusions.

For our purposes we will highlight several relevant points from his work on *Justification*. First, we shall note how Owen conceives of the existential situation – which is based in the objective reality of one's guilt – that gives birth to the question of justification. Second, Owen's handling of the topic of faith shows how he attempts to weave together human responsiveness and Christology. This leads us to our third point, noting how Owen sees the priestly work of Christ as key to understanding justification. Fourth, we shall look into his discussion concerning 'two justifications,'

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debate about the "formal cause" of justification. For more on the historical context of Owen's *Doctrine of Justification*, see L. G. Williams, "'Digitus Dei,'" 299 ff.

[4] Clifford, in his *Atonement and Justification,* primarily discusses Owen's view of justification in light of his statements regarding limited atonement, drawing heavily upon *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647). Given the title of Clifford's book there is surprisingly little interaction with Owen's most complete and theologically mature statement on justification found in *The Doctrine of Justification* (1677). For our purposes, we shall therefore focus on this neglected source, giving little attention to the much-discussed topic of the atonement's extent.

which actually centers upon the relationship between faith and works. Finally, the vital role of imputation will be explored.

Approaching the Doctrine of Justification

While one might assume that Owen would begin his discussion of justification by outlining particular attributes of God, in actuality, he begins with *humanity*. Here we find the consistent anthroposensitive emphasis that arises throughout his corpus. Pointing to this *sensitivity* is considerably different from suggesting that he has an anthropocentric, as opposed to a theocentric, approach.[6] Owen is not so easily categorized by this somewhat artificial juxtaposition. Rather, he appreciated the human, and more importantly, the Christological implications of all theology, and this allowed him to freely move between doing theology 'from above' and 'from below.' These phrases are used throughout our study in terms of reference points; the latter stressing human and existential questions, the former focusing on revelation of the Divine being. While Owen never ultimately separates the two, especially as we have already seen in his conception of Christ, we use this distinction to show his particular emphasis.

Strongly believing that one must first rightly conceptualize oneself before properly comprehending and appreciating justification, Owen begins with the human dilemma. Simply stated: because of Adam's original sin, each subsequent human being is now born morally deformed. The image that once reflected the Creator has been shattered, with the result that all of creation no longer has a clear representation of God. When the fallen human looks at himself he feels burdened by his sin: until he finds a way to be freed from his guilt, he remains in paralyzing despair. From this state of despair he can only find hope when his gaze turns away from self and towards Christ.[7] Only through the incarnate Christ, as we explained in chapter three, does the image of God again become clearly apparent; in Christ's person and work the sinful human sees the Son of God in his humility and terrifying perfection. Christ provides hope for the hopeless through both forgiveness of sins *and* by the imputation of righteousness.

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[5] *Works*, 5: 4.

[6] See introduction to chapter one where we first define anthroposensitive.

[7] See *Works*, 2: 189 for a vivid description of this psychological process.

The above summary provides a rough map of how Owen understands the human journey from despair to hope, from guilt to righteousness. Owen begins his "General Considerations" – a 70 page (!) introduction to this work – by clearly stating his twofold aim: to reveal the "glory of God in Christ" and to aid in the "peace and furtherance of the obedience of believers."[8] Having stated his general aim, he begins with an anthropological consideration by assuming the universal sinfulness and guilt of humankind. Since Owen desires to penetrate the heart of his readers, he begins with *them* rather than diving into abstract concepts about God's nature. Owen's first "inquiry" concentrates on the person in need of justification, while his second inquiry deals with the "God that justifieth."[9] In typical Calvinist fashion, a reciprocal relationship exists between knowledge of God and knowledge of self.

Owen sets out to relieve the burdened conscience that feels overcome by sin. To accomplish this, he first moves to examine man's natural state. Using mostly Pauline vocabulary, Owen describes the human being in need of justification as "ungodly" (ἀσεβής), "guilty before God" (ὑπόδικος τῷ θεῳ), "liable τῷ δικαίωματι τοῦ θεοῦ" (i.e., to the righteousness of God), under "the curse" (ὑπὸ κατάραν), and finally in a position where he is "without plea, without excuse" (ἀναπολόγητος).[10] By employing this vocabulary, which stresses culpability, Owen urges the reader to conclude, "What must I do to be saved?"[11] Once this self-realization occurs, the person is enabled to face the immediate questions regarding justification: how will God forgive *my* sins? How can God ever consider a sinner righteous and no longer guilty? Could a sinner ever have a "right and title unto a blessed immortality"? Having reached this point with his reader, Owen then proceeds to discuss his method for answering these deeply personal questions.

Moving beyond his "General Considerations," Owen again reveals his instinct to begin with anthropological concerns. Many familiar with common caricatures of Owen might assume that he would start by indifferently examining God's nature with

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[8] *Works,* 5: 7.

[9] The first begins on *Works,* 5: 7, the second on p. 13. Section three on p. 20 moves back to an anthropological discussion of man's sin and guilt under the law.

[10] *Works,* 5: 7. Cf. Romans 4:5; 3:19; 1: 32, 2:1; Gal. 3: 10, 22; and John 3: 18, 36. Note that although most of the time he gives both the Greek accompanied by the biblical verse, at other times he simply uses the Greek with the assumption that his reader will easily be able to locate the reference. For example, when referring to the adjective ἀναπολόγητος, which is only used in Rom. 2:1, Owen either thinks a scriptural reference is unnecessary, or he simply neglects to include it.

[11] *Works,* 5: 8. He employs this technique elsewhere, e.g. *Works,* 17: 433-34 (*BT,* 628-30).

detached Aristotelian logic, but in reality he begins with a discussion of *faith*, which is the "means of justification on our part."[12] This observation ought to give pause. Although exemplifying a premier seventeenth century Reformed theologian who believes without compromise in God's sovereign election, Owen nevertheless freely begins his discussion of justification with *man's* role in faith, rather than God's role through predestination.[13] We shall therefore give significant attention to Owen's presentation of faith since it illustrates how he brings together the dynamic relationship between a personal God and weakened humanity. Here again we find Owen seeking both faithfulness to his theological tradition and fidelity to human experience.

How to Understand Justifying Faith

According to Owen – who follows a common distinction often used by the early Reformers – there are two kinds of faith seen in the scriptures, one justifying the other not.[14] Some, like Simon the Magician in Acts 8, are said to have believed, but this was not a true faith that "purified the heart." Only the faith that has a "root in the heart" will justify.[15] Behind this discussion lies Owen's effort to make sense of a common sociological phenomenon witnessed in his day. Many men and women attended church, having made a profession of faith sometime in the past, but their attitudes and actions seemed to show the observer – at least in Owen's mind – that they did not love God. How can this be? Does not *any* faith bring justification? Does not every Christian love God, which is displayed through thankful obedience? For Owen, there is either genuine justifying faith or a powerless "temporary faith." True faith, by its very nature, manifests itself in the disposition and actions of the

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[12] *Works*, 5: 70.

[13] Cf. Ames, whose work moves quickly from the definition and divisions in theology to the question of faith, only afterwards to move to a discussion of God's essence and subsistence, 77-94. Historically this proves interesting in light of the development of Hyper-Calvinism in England, which often downplayed the significance of the individual out of concern for God's sovereignty. E.g., C. Daniel, "John Gill and Hypercalvinism," (Ph.D., University of Edinburgh, 1983); Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity, 1689-1765* (London: The Olive Tree, 1967). Cf. the recent reassessment by George M. Ella, "John Gill and the Charge of Hyper-Calvinism," *BQ* 36, no. 4 (1995), 160-77.

[14] See Philip E. Hughes, *Theology of the English Reformers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, new edition 1980), 55. Cf. Johannes Wollebius, "Compendium Theologiae Christianae," in *Reformed Dogmatics: Seventeenth-Century Reformed Theology Through the Writings of Wollebius, Voetius, and Turretin*, ed. John W. Beardslee III (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 161-63.

[15] *Works*, 5: 71. Here he looks at Acts 8: 13, Acts 15:9, Rom. 10:10.

believer.[16] However, this idea raises serious questions for the anxious soul who desires to know if he has true faith.

Owen describes faith for his readers in a fourfold manner: faith's causes, a person's duty before faith, the object of justifying faith, and the nature of faith.[17] The fourth point is originally introduced by Owen as the "acts and effects of faith," but no such title resurfaces. Therefore the following chapter in Owen's treatise, which discusses the "nature of faith" and reads as if completing the previous discussion, should be taken as his fourth point; he (or his publisher) appears to have neglected continuing with the numbering scheme. If this is not the case then Owen must have left out his fourth proposed concern – unlikely for someone as systematic as this Oxford theologian. We shall consider each discussion of faith in turn.

I. Causes of Faith

Regarding the 'causes of faith' in *The Doctrine of Justification*, Owen simply states that he has discussed it elsewhere. He is most likely referring to a section in his first book, *A Display of Arminianism* (1643).[18] In the context of this earlier writing Owen is attacking what he believes is the Remonstrants' mistake of 1) undervaluing Christ whose death is the "meritorious cause" of faith, grace, and righteousness, as well as 2) neglecting the efficacious role of God the Holy Spirit as the one who brings faith. This judgement prompts him to accuse them of making "fools of all the doctors of the church who ever opposed the Pelagian heresy."[19]

The point for Owen in this early context is that, while faith is often thought of as a human work, it must always have as its background the gracious movement of God. Throughout scripture he sees a tension: *God commands* certain duties or responses by people; *God alone empowers* rebellious people to respond and obey him. So, for example, Deuteronomy 10:16 speaks of God's command for the people to circumcise their hearts and be stiff necked no longer. Reading on to Deuteronomy 30:6, we learn that *God* is the one who "will circumcise their hearts" so that they will wholly love God. In Ezekiel 18:31 Israel is commanded to have a "new heart and a new spirit," otherwise they will die. As a command it demands obedience, and yet

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[16] Cf. *Works*, 21: 246.
[17] This discussion can be followed from *Works*, 5: 73-107.
[18] *Works*, 10: 100-107.
[19] *Works*, 10: 103.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 explains that God is the one who will provide what is required by giving the people a new heart, taking "away the stony heart out of your flesh."[20] Examples like this, according to Owen, could be presented endlessly. Given this apparent contradiction in scripture Owen concludes that "the same thing, in diverse respects, may be God's act in us and our duty towards him."[21] If this is denied one ends up with Arminian moralism rather than gospel proclamation.

In his later book, *The Doctrine of Justification*, Owen simply notes from the outset that justifying faith is unique and that this particular usage is different from a commonplace understanding of the word. This faith has "its first original in the divine will."[22] Before Owen discusses a person's duty before faith, he makes certain that this underlying truth of divine gracious activity is seen as a non-negotiable presupposition for all that follows.

II. A Person's Duty Before Faith

Next Owen discusses at length what is required of men and women before belief: each individual must realize their own sinfulness. Sounding similar to Luther, he emphasizes the role of the law as the means to bring consciousness of sin. When effective, the law stirs the heart and causes "the conviction of sin [which] is a necessary antecedent unto justifying faith."[23] Although a person must come to see his guilt under the law, which allows him to become subjectum capax justificationis, this conviction does not necessitate a person's justification.[24] As will be seen later, more is needed than a passing feeling of guilt or an intellectual assent.

While conviction of sin itself does not justify, it provides the necessary first step toward such a possibility. Before a patient will go to the doctor, he must first recognize that he is sick.[25] Owen goes on to describe the qualities and manifestations – both internal and external – of true and lasting conviction. These include sorrow for sin, fear of punishment, fleeing from known sin, and involving oneself in the normal means of worshiping God. It is interesting that after discussing this, Owen stops in

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[20] *Works*, 10: 105.

[21] *Works*, 10: 105.

[22] *Works*, 5: 74.

[23] *Works*, 5: 74. This is a standard puritan pattern – humiliation precedes faith. Cf. Thomas Shepard, *The Sound Believer. . .* (London: 1671), 66-68, 123-25.

[24] Cf. *Works*, 5: 98.

[25] *Works*, 17: 431 (*BT*, 625).

his tracks to make sure he has not been misunderstood: none of these are "conditions of justification"![26] There are numerous dangers, according to Owen, which grow out of confusion at just this point. Owen may have the Council of Trent's discussion of adult preparation for justification in mind here.[27] He may also be thinking of others – including some Protestants – who had allowed this type of discussion to go too far when their idea of faith became loaded with requirements.[28] Without hesitation Owen therefore jumps 'from below' to 'from above' in his methodology, believing that a misunderstanding here would greatly obscure his overall goal of exalting Christ and encouraging believers in obedience.

Acknowledging his clear skepticism regarding human faithfulness to God, Owen calls the reader's attention to God's faithfulness, rather than to his own. If Christians do not recognize God's role as the giver and sustainer of their faith they will quickly return to despair when their faith grows weak and their obedience wavers. Desiring to comfort the hearts of his readers, Owen reminds them of God's dealing with Adam after the fall.[29] He suggests that it was *God* who opened Adam's eyes so that he could see the reality of his sin. Once the blinders were fully removed Adam felt ashamed and wanted to conceal himself; finding no escape from his sin it became instinctual to hide from God. Only through *God's* "act of sovereign grace" will the sinner ever be able to enter again into God's presence. God's merciful intervention is the true cause of human faith. This caveat is Owen's attempt to place the individual's duty prior to faith within the cosmic context of God's gracious governance.

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[26] *Works,* 5:78.

[27] See *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent,* trans. H. J. Schroeder (Rockford: TAN Books, 1978), 31-34.

[28] This occurs often in those theologians who argue for the "imputation of faith" rather than of Christ's righteousness. Two predominant figures of this position include John Goodwin (1594?-1665) and Richard Baxter (1615-91). Goodwin's main work in this area is aptly titled, *Imputatio Fidei* (London, 1642). To understand Baxter's controversial and complex position on justification, see his *Aphorisms on Justification* (London, 1649), and *A Treatise of Justifying Righteousness* (London, 1676). The best treatment of Baxter's view of justification is found in H. Boersma, *A Hot Peppercorn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993). Cf. G. McGrath, "Puritans and the Human Will," esp. Appendix, and Ryken, 151-62. William Sherlock, *A Discourse Concerning the Knowledge of Jesus Christ, and our Union and Communion with him, etc.* (London: 1674, 1st ed.), 337-52, was also opposed to imputation of Christ's righteousness.

[29] See *Works,* 5: 79-80.

III. The Object of Faith

Moving beyond the discussion of a person's duty before faith, Owen turns to the question of the "object of justifying faith." Primarily interacting with Robert Bellarmine's work (1542-1621) as representing "Rome,"[30] Owen claims that a significant difference surfaces between the two traditions regarding the object of faith.[31] Rome, Owen concludes, promotes nothing more than "an assent unto divine revelation."[32] This emphasis was common among mediaeval scholastics, going back most significantly to Thomas Aquinas.[33] For Roman theologians this revelation includes the teaching of the Church in the apostolic tradition in addition to the biblical testimony. Bellarmine represents his tradition's emphasis which tends to highlight the promises of God in revelation as the object of faith.[34] Although Owen's opponents would disagree with his shaping of the nuances, he nevertheless tries to make a clear distinction between the two positions. In our limited study we cannot fairly present the details of the complex debate between Owen and his Roman opponents. Our interest lies not primarily in whether Owen creates a straw-man position to attack, but instead in how his attacks reveal his theological instincts, even if in the process he too easily dismisses his opponents.[35]

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[30] "Rome" will often be used to represent Roman Catholicism. This is done for several reasons. First, this represents Owen's language. Second, we cannot fairly speak of "Catholic" in seventeenth century debates, since Owen and his Puritan contemporaries would argue their theology is catholic, and to attribute this exalted title to "Rome" biases any discussion from the beginning, G. S. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion: Its Place in the Development of Christian Piety* (London: Epworth, 1957), 23. For the sake of reminding the reader of the historical context we will likewise often employ Owen's shorthand.

[31] For background on Bellarmine, see James Brodrick, *Robert Bellarmine: Saint and Scholar* (London: Burnes & Oates, 1961). Possibly the most famous Protestant response to Bellarmine came from the pen of Lancelot Andrewes, who wrote *Responsio ad Apologiam Cardinalis Bellarmine* in 1610, attempting to answer Bellarmine point by point. Bellarmine's fullest discussion of justification comes from his massive tome, *Disputationum. . . de controversiis Christianae fidei* (Coloniae Agrippineae, repr. 1628). While Owen severely attacks Bellarmine's view of justification, he was able elsewhere to admit when Bellarmine was right, as on the topic of predestination, see *Works*, 10: 62.

[32] *Works,* 5: 80 f. Elsewhere in this treatise Owen himself argues for the necessity of a "sincere assent unto all divine revelations," noting the importance of revelation as pointing to the promises of Christ, 5: 99.

[33] For Aquinas' discussion of the object of faith, begin with *ST*, 2a2ae.1-5.

[34] This emphasis remains even today, as seen in the excellent work of the Catholic theologian Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), 185-203.

[35] For more detailed analysis of the differences between Catholic and early Protestant views of justification, which included their views of faith, begin with G. R. Evans, *Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), esp. 119-136; Ricardo Franco, "Justification," in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. Karl Rahner (London: Burns & Oates, 1969), 239-241; J. P. Kenny, "Justification," in *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Monsignor H. Francis Davis, et al. (London: Nelson, 1971), 172-182; Hans Kung, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth*

For Owen, the object of faith must take on a sense of a personal encounter, rather than a simple reference to historical realities. True faith communicates much more than mere assent, requiring a whole-souled response of the individual: it is an "act of the heart; which, in the Scripture, compriseth all the faculties of the soul."[36] He goes on to emphasize the particular importance of both the heart and the will. John von Rohr claims that there are three prominent positions regarding faith's relationship to justification among Puritan thinkers.[37] The first stressed intellectual assent, as represented by George Downame and William Perkins. A second position, best represented by William Ames, believes that the locus of faith is not in the intellect but rather in an act of the will. Out of these two emerges a *via media* propounded by the majority of Puritans. According to this more common view, there must be a "significant place for both intellect and will in faith's act."[38] Owen falls into this third camp. His holistic anthropology surfaces at this point and keeps him arguing for a concept of faith which touches the entire person.

As noted in our discussion regarding faculty psychology, Owen uses this paradigm to make sense of how the human being responds to God.[39] Believers do not receive a supernatural faculty – as often portrayed in medieval scholasticism – but rather they respond with their natural faculties through faith. In the special providence of God, faith serves as the means by which a human may uniquely receive and respond to God. Faith must be "distinguished from opinion and moral certainty on the one hand, and science or demonstration on the other," which means that faith is

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and a Catholic Reflection, trans. Thomas Collins, Edmund Tolk, David Grandskou (London: Burns & Oates, 1964); P. De Letter, "Justification: In Catholic Theology," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 81-88; H. Edward Symonds, *The Council of Trent and Anglican Formularies* (London: OUP, 1933); Alister E. McGrath, "Justification," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: OUP, 1996), 360-368; idem, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 1998). Note also the recent Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, which states: "By justification we are unconditionally brought into communion with God," in the "Official Common Statement by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church," *One in Christ* XXXVI, no. 1 (2000): 89-92.

[36] *Works*, 5: 83. Again Owen's polemic tends to flatten out the complexity of his Roman opponents by adopting a view of faith different from the Catholic understanding of saving faith as faith formed by love. For a fair comparison between medieval scholastic views of "saving faith" and that of an English Reformer, see Ashley Null, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of Repentance: Renewing the Power to Love* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 116-212. I am grateful to Dr. Null for countless hours of conversation regarding this thorny issue.

[37] John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*, ed. Charley Harkwick and James O. Duke, AAR Studies in Religion, vol. 45 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 68-72.

[38] von Rohr, 71, recognizes the difficulty in trying to create such divisions, for this third position still tends to stress the intellect over the will – a characteristic we find in Owen.

an "act of that power of our souls. . . whereby we are able firmly to assent unto the truth upon testimony, in things not evident unto us by sense or reason."[40]

True faith requires not only the mind, but a whole-souled response.[41] Consistently employing the language of *action* throughout this section, Owen stresses a relational emphasis which guides his concern about the object of faith. At different points he freely explores the language used to describe the various *acts* of faith, thus attempting to present a holistic conception for his readers: faith is "a peculiar acting of the soul for deliverance," an "act of the heart," an "act of the will," an "act of our mind."[42] Danger arises when one tries to limit faith to only one of these. Justifying faith must be alive and relational, requiring a dynamic response to its object. Assent is necessary for justifying faith, yet that is only part of the story, for one must assent unto the "testimony of God" *who* is "the revealer."[43] What Owen considers vital is not simply an ancient text known as revelation, but the one who is both the Reveal*er* and the Reveal*ed*.[44]

Another potential misunderstanding comes from those who claim that the 'pardon of our sins' is the object of faith.[45] Some had borrowed this language from the Reformers, but in so doing had inappropriately – in Owen's mind – made the personal assurance of sins forgiven the great test for identifying true faith. This is problematic, however, on account of the common experience of believers who often struggle with feeling assurance. To argue such a position reveals one who is

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[39] See chapter 2, "John Owen's Formulation of the *imago Dei*."

[40] *Works,* 5: 81. Cf. Aquinas, *ST,* 1a.46.2. Aquinas argues that the beginning of the world and the Trinity are matters of faith based on revelation "on which faith rests," rather than based on "demonstration or science." Cf. *ST,* 3a.7.3.

[41] Cf. Owen's statement from 1645: "Faith is in the understanding, in respect of its being and subsistence, – in the will and heart, in respect of its effectual working." *Works,* 1: 486.

[42] We have limited the examples, which could easily be expanded, by drawing only from *Works,* 5: 81-83.

[43] *Works,* 5: 81. See below for further discussion of faith as more than assent.

[44] Owen is certainly not alone in emphasizing the *person* of Christ as the object of faith in seventeenth century English theology, although his clarity on the subject remains noteworthy. George Downame's earlier argument proceeds in a similar style. While Christians should believe everything revealed or inferred from the scriptures – though not the Apocrypha or teaching of the "Church of Rome" (to which Bellarmine extends revelation) – he wants to narrow the discussion. "But howsoever by that faith, which justifieth, wee beleeve all and every truth revealed by God; yet the 'proper and formal Object of justifying faith, quatenus justificat, and by beleeving whereof it doth justifie, is not every truth, but that onely, which. . . is called the Truth, that is Christ with all his merits..." *A Treatise of Justification.* (London: Nicholas Bourne, 1639), 361. Turretin, *Elenctic Theology,* 2: 558-631, esp. 571-80, offers a detailed account of the object of faith, but with a little less emphasis on Christ's 'person' than is found in Owen's treatment of the subject.

"neglective of their own experience," for if they knew themselves better they would not make such unguarded claims. As noted throughout our study, Owen considers Christian experience legitimate and necessary for discerning correct doctrine. Obviously he does not want to deny the importance of the assurance of one's sins pardoned, but even this vital experience is not the proper *object* of true faith. Later Owen will argue that assurance is better understood as an *effect* of God's love through Christ, rather than the actual *object* of faith.[46]

In this context Owen observes that many of the "great divines" of the Reformation "make the mercy of God in Christ, and thereby the forgiveness of our sins, to be the proper object of justifying faith."[47] Here again we find a personal emphasis (i.e., 'our') included. In Owen's estimation, the great divide between Rome and Protestant Reformers can be found in how they answered the following question: can one enjoy "a state of rest and assured peace with God" while "in this life?" The Reformers needed to address the psychological grief and fear of their listeners if their message was to free men and women burdened by Rome's over-emphasis on human merit. Distancing himself from others less pastorally sensitive who fail to account fully for the Christian experience of doubt, Owen claims that nowhere in the Reformers' writings does he read that *every* Christian "always had a full assurance of the especial love of God in Christ." In other words, a person with a wounded conscience often finds it difficult to believe that *their* sins are forgiven. And to include such a personal dimension brings the possibility of grave misunderstandings. For example, believers might place too much weight on their subjective experiences rather than trusting the objective promises grounded in Christ.[48] Here Owen argues that when understood rightly his formulation echoes the Reformers' conception of faith.

A brief look at John Calvin's discussion of the object of faith will demonstrate how close he and Owen are on many fronts, especially in terms of their Christological

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[45] *Works,* 5: 83-85, 102.

[46] *Works,* 5: 88.

[47] *Works,* 5: 84 ff.

[48] Cf. Beeke, (1991), 262, rightly sees Owen as accepting levels of assurance. The higher level is full assurance – which includes both subjective and objective dimensions – and not of the essence of faith. The lower level is grounded solely in the objective truths of justification and the promises of God. To see how this issue surfaces throughout Puritan ministry, especially in the catechisms of the seventeenth century, see Green, 387-421.

emphasis. According to Calvin, one should not simply speak of God as the object of faith, for there is a needed qualification, namely that Christ is the image of the invisible God.[49] The "schools" have incorrectly answered the question of the object of faith because "they call God simply the object of faith, and by fleeting speculations . . . lead miserable souls astray rather than direct them to a definite goal," which is to embrace Christ "our intermediary."[50] Likewise Calvin stresses that God's glory is "visible to us in His person," adding later that "as God he [i.e., Christ] is the destination to which we move; as man, the path by which we go." Trinitarian language becomes significant for Calvin because of his strong Christology; the Son communicates the benefits of the Father and the Spirit draws people to seek Christ. He furthermore emphasizes the role of "knowledge" in connection with faith, for people are called to receive Christ as "clothed with his gospel." Here Calvin highlights the fundamental role of revelation, testifying of Christ and making faith possible, while still maintaining that the object of faith is Christ himself. Faith and the "Word" cannot be separated any more than one can "separate the rays from the sun from which they come." True faith is not about agreeing that God exists, nor is it about speculating what God is "in himself," but rather it is concerned with "what he wills to be toward us," and that is only understood in light of Christ. For Christ displays both the truth of God and his mercy toward humanity.

At this point we can return to Owen's formulation to see how he continues with similar emphases. After addressing many of the misconceptions, Owen restates his slightly altered twofold purpose for the book: "the advancement and glory of the grace of God in Christ, with the conduct of the souls of men unto rest and peace with him."[51] While acknowledging that various theologians disagree on the question of the object of faith, Owen seems to think that most of the dissension stems from misunderstanding. In this vein he offers a formulation of the object of faith which he hopes others will find acceptable:

> that the *Lord Jesus Christ himself*, as the ordinance of God, in his work of mediation for the recovery and salvation of lost sinners, and as unto that end proposed in the promise of the gospel, is the adequate, proper object of

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[49] Calvin, *Institutes*, II.6.4.

[50] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.2.1. The rest of the quotations come from a section of his discussion of faith in III.2.1-7. Calvin's examination of faith in a broader context continues throughout III.2. and III.3.

[51] *Works*, 5: 85.

> justifying faith, or of saving faith in its work and duty with respect unto our justification.[52]

What quickly becomes obvious in this formulation is Owen's relational emphasis. He concentrates primarily upon Christ's person and work, moving from this to its beneficial consequences for believers.

Clearly the most significant element of the above quotation is how it begins, with the "*Lord Jesus Christ himself.*" This beginning statement functions as a sort of umbrella under which the rest shelters. If Christ is the true object of faith, everything else naturally follows. Owen, like Calvin before him, believed that faith must ultimately rest on Christ rather than on speculations of the unknown divine. Statements about the object of faith fail from inadequately grounding the discussion on a particular person, Jesus Christ. Later in the treatise Owen makes this point directly by saying that justifying faith means "the receiving of Christ, principally respect[ing] his person."[53] Through this subtle move to make Christ's person the hinge for everything else, Owen attempts to stop unnecessary disputes which often result from not focusing on the unifying truth of Christ's person.

By this emphasis on Christ's person Owen again reveals the high importance he assigns to the incarnation. Jesus as the Son of God represents the divine desire to redeem those who are lost. The triune God did not present humanity with a proposition to believe, but rather by the "ordinance of God" Christ came into the world. In doing so, the incarnate Mediator becomes the sole person who can reconcile sinful humanity with the holy God, and as such he alone is the proper object of faith. Owen's language can be fluid, and elsewhere he speaks freely of "the blood of Christ" as the "object of faith."[54] Nevertheless, even here the object he is referring to remains ultimately Christ's person – the blood of Christ is shorthand for the Priesthood of Christ, a theme we will again discuss below.

A Christocentric beginning for his definition of the object of faith only makes sense to Owen when it points to God the Father who also becomes "the immediate

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[52] *Works,* 5: 85-86; cf. 89. Emphasis mine. Cf. John Downe, who claims that "the object of faith" must be "the person of the Mediator" and not "present grace and future glory," *A Treatise of the True Nature and Definition of justifying faith* (Oxford, 1635), A2, cited by von Rohr, 66.

[53] *Works,* 5: 116-117. In this context Owen unites faith in Christ's person with the promises of God. Additionally he argues that Christ's priestly office is more closely concerned with the believer's justification than his role as prophet or king. In other words, Christ's person cannot ultimately be understood apart from his work. See below for how Owen develops this line of thought.

object of faith as justifying."[55] Reflecting his fidelity to a Trinitarian emphasis, Owen sees that faith without reference to the redeeming Triune God inevitably brings theological disaster. This disaster usually comes in the form of viewing the Father in a disposition of anger and Christ in one of love.[56] Nothing could be further from the truth, according to the Puritan pastor, for it was the Father's love which first sent the Son as much as the Son's love in agreeing to accept the mission. So to believe in Christ as the object of faith includes trusting in the loving disposition of the Father toward "lost sinners." As we will see later, the Spirit faithfully applies the work of Christ to the lives of believers, sustaining and preparing them for glory. In other words, Owen's Christocentricism can never be rightly understood outside of this Trinitarian conception of redemption, a theme we discuss at length in chapter five.

Thus we see that Owen presents a *person* as the object of faith, rather than concepts, promises, or a set of beliefs. A ruined relationship caused the need for justification, which prompted God the Father to reach out to humanity through his Son, whose person and work guaranteed a restored relationship between God and his people, and this relationship is most clearly enjoyed in glory.[57] Sinners are not called to become academics who must learn a certain number of propositions in order to experience justifying faith.[58] Instead, they are called to turn to a person – the living incarnate Christ – for justification.

Scripture's purpose can be summed up as God's testimony to Christ as the proper object of faith. Beginning with "Moses and the prophets; the design of the whole Scripture [is] to direct the faith of the church unto the Lord Christ alone, for life and salvation."[59] Likewise, prayer testifies to Christ as the proper object of faith.[60] Following his practical method, Owen sees the daily devotional experience of believers as a strong argument supporting his conclusions. The believer's relationship to Christ enables him to have access to the "throne of grace." In a later work Owen

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[54] *Works*, 5: 121. Here again Owen may be following the lead of theologians like Downame, 361, who also speaks of "faith in the blood of Christ" in order to prove Christ represents the object of faith.

[55] *Works*, 5: 86.

[56] Cf. *Works*, 2: 17-40.

[57] Cf. *Works*, 7: 337.

[58] W. Sherlock, *Union and Communion with him* (1678, 3rd ed. corrected), 22, 24, 38, etc., believes Owen is too mystical and so opposes Christ's *person* as the object of faith, preferring to speak instead of "the Gospel" as the object of faith.

[59] *Works*, 5: 90. He cites Luke 24:25-27 to support his claim. Note how Owen structures his work on the history of salvation in *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΟΥΜΕΝΑ ΠΑΝΤΟΔΑΠΑ*, *Works*, 17: 27-480.

repeats this theme by claiming that though prayer proceeds "from faith" it "must be fixed on the person so called on . . . or that prayer is in vain."[61] Thus the object of faith consistently points to a *person* and the relationship between him and his people. Take the object away and all other Christian propositions become meaningless.

IV. The Nature of Faith

Before we move beyond the topic of faith we must conclude with the question of its nature. Like the object of faith, the *nature* of faith has produced great disagreements. According to Owen, various opinions and unending attempts at definition only multiplied the confusion. For our purposes, we shall limit our observations to his emphasis on the place of trust and then conclude with his accent on biblical imagery.

With the conviction of sin one enters into the state of *subjectum capax justificationis*, in which despair becomes the overriding emotion. From this position the subject must trust another since he himself has failed. Primarily through the reception of the preached word can faith respond with "a sincere renunciation of all other ways and means for the attaining of righteousness, life, and salvation." Likewise, the "will's consent" moves unto an "expectation of pardon of sin and righteousness before God."[62] A believer does not only receive the forgiveness of sin, but he learns to continually trust that only through his connection to Christ can he be considered free of sin and righteous before God.

The term *trust* best encapsulates the essence of Owen's concerns at this point, where he appears to have the Reformers' conception of *fiducia* in mind.[63] He believes that the notion of trust surfaces throughout the Bible, especially in the Old Testament when it refers to the nature of faith. Yet again, we find Owen quick to qualify his assessment by denying that all believers will have full assurance that *their own personal sins* have been forgiven.[64] He denies this in light of Christian experience that testifies to the fact that a stable "undeceiving belief" is often not attained this side of glory, even though this ought to be every Christian's desire and "privilege." Others – here he refers to the "Papists" and Socinians – unwisely make the mistake of

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[60] *Works*, 5: 92.
[61] *Works*, 1: 129.
[62] *Works*, 5: 100, 101.
[63] See *Works*, 5: 101 -107.

including obedience as an "essential form of faith" concerning justification. Trust in Christ results from God's Spirit "transforming" the soul of an individual, the gracious gift of a "principle of spiritual life" which naturally ties together 1) the gift of faith with 2) the natural outworking of obedience. These, however, ought never to be collapsed into one another. Failure to keep this distinction, Owen argues, grows out of a naïvely optimistic anthropology rather than a biblical depiction of humanity that stresses the radical effects of sin.

Love and obedience are the *manifestations* of God's sovereign work, rather than its cause. The Roman doctrine of faith as enlivened by charity seems the cause of his concern. Confirming his theological allegiance, Owen rehearses the Reformation motto: "we are justified by faith alone, but not by that faith which is alone."[65] His following paragraphs show that he includes such things as repentance, baptism, and final perseverance as falling under the second clause of the motto. Owen believes that many of the ancient Christian writers failed to make the necessary distinction between conditions, instruments, and results. Faith alone serves as the instrument, and those who claim various aspects of Christian obedience (e.g., baptism) as conditional for salvation are gravely mistaken. Herein lies the problem with so many attempts at a definition of the "nature" of faith: ambiguous language creates a kind of theological chaos rather than Christian comfort.

Elsewhere in the book Owen recognizes the growing debate regarding the language of "instrumentality." Not only Rome and the Socinians, but also many Protestants were claiming this terminology improper.[66] Recognizing the Protestant scholar who wrestled most with this question, Owen believes "Dr. Jackson" offers a fair, "pious and sound" definition.[67] Having given this compliment, Owen nevertheless still finds himself unsatisfied and argues for a modified approach.

While often employing scholastic categories elsewhere, here Owen's pastoral sensitivity appears to motivate him to avoid continuing this type of debate.[68] Instead he proposes that the most appropriate way to speak of true faith comes through "the

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[64] Cf. *Works*, 9: 588.

[65] *Works*, 5: 104.

[66] *Works*, 5: 108-111. Cf. also 5: 114-115, where he reveals his frustration with the ambiguity regarding the language of "condition."

[67] See Thomas Jackson, *Justifying Faith* (London: 1631), esp. 48-81.

[68] Early on in this treatise Owen argued against those who made justification into a speculative and abstract debate, "mixing evangelical revelation with philosophical notions... [which resulted in] the poison of religion," *Works*, 5: 10.

lively scriptural expressions of faith, by *receiving* of Christ, *leaning* on him, *rolling* ourselves or our burden on him, *tasting* how gracious the Lord is, and the like," for these expressions "convey a better understanding of the nature, work, and object of justifying faith, unto the minds of men spiritually enlightened, than the most accurate definitions that many pretend unto."[69] Definitions can be ambiguous, formulaic, and are often sapped of all spiritual power. By employing biblical imagery, Owen thinks the discussion moves from mental abstraction to spiritual awareness (cf. "enlightened mind").[70] Again, if one's theology does not both exalt Christ and promote Christian obedience then the theology has somehow gone wrong – an inadequate or reductionist presentation can contribute to that failure.[71] Although he begins the chapter with a brief declaration – some might argue that it is a sort of definition – of what he thinks describes the "exercise" of justifying faith,[72] he ends by pointing back to colorful and captivating images in scripture. This is yet another example showing that while Owen's scholasticism is real, it should never be confused with a formulaic rationalism, but rather understood as an experimental biblicism.[73]

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[69] *Works,* 5: 107, emphasis mine.

[70] See *Works*, 17: 430 ff. (*BT*, 624 ff.), where Owen argues that an emphasis on the scriptures must be accompanied by an understanding of the Spirit's enlivening activity, making the scriptures powerful in the heart of the reader.

[71] Note Bobick's complaint, 44, that Owen's "disinterest in a definition of justifying faith" hurts the Puritan, making it unclear if obedience is on par with faith. This seems to misunderstand Owen's reasons for avoiding such a definition.

[72] See *Works*, 5: 93.

[73] This conclusion goes against that propounded by Owen's nineteenth century biographer, Andrew Thomson, *Life of Dr. Owen* (Edinburgh, 1850), *Works*, 1: xviv-cxxii. When discussing Owen's treatise on *The Doctrine of Justification*, Thomson believes that Owen and other Puritan divines, "with their scholastic distinctions, were far inferior to the theologians of the Reformation. The great difficulty about faith is not a metaphysical but a moral one; and there is truth in the observation, that elaborate attempts to describe it are like handling a beautiful transparency, whose lustre disappears whensoever it is touched," *Works*, 1: xcvi. In actuality, Owen apparently felt free to use both sophisticated scholastic language *and* imaginative biblical imagery; each served its own purpose and could be used in the appropriate context.

Christ's Priestly Importance

As noted in previous discussions, Owen closely links Christ's person with his work. Acknowledging some debate among Reformed theologians on how the offices of Christ relate to justification, Owen believes there is freedom for further inquiry. What he does not want to do is argue for the sake of "curiosity" as others have done, but rather with the goal of "edification."[74] Given this criterion, he begins by reemphasizing how faith must be in Christ's person. Debate arises when the theologian unpacks this in terms of Christ's offices of king, prophet, and priest.

Believing in the unity of Christ's offices, Owen nevertheless argues that Christ's *priestly* office deserves the greatest attention in relationship to the question of justification.[75] One must remember that for Owen justification chiefly concerns both the lack of individual righteousness and the guilt experienced as a result of sin. Humanity's desperate position requires priestly activity of the sort that only the Son of God can accomplish. "Such was his incarnation, the whole course of his obedience, his resurrection, ascension, exaltation, and intercession; for the consideration of all these things is inseparable from the discharge of his priestly office."[76] Behind Christ's earthly activities lie his priestly motivations. Functioning in his "sacerdotal office," Christ offers himself as the ultimate sacrifice. [77] The Bible speaks of "faith in the blood of Christ" (Rom. 3:25), but it never does so in reference to Jesus as king or prophet. Qualifying his argument by not completely excluding the other offices, Owen still maintains that the priestly office best exemplifies this particular aspect of redemption. Relying on biblical imagery about Christ, which so often consists of sacrificial representations, Owen finds himself compelled to see the priestly office as central. The other offices of Christ are not "towards God on our behalf," although they are all necessary for the salvation of sinners.[78] It is Christ's actions in his

> sacerdotal office alone, that respect God on our behalf. Whatever he did on earth with God for the church, in obedience, suffering, and offering up of

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[74] For this discussion, see *Works,* 5: 116-123.

[75] This traditional Reformed emphasis continues into the twentieth century as represented by L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994 rpt.), 356-411. Berkhof spends just over 3 pages on Christ's prophetic office, 6 pages on his kingly office, but 44 pages on his priestly office, which covers the atonement and Christ's continued intercessory work.

[76] *Works*, 5: 117. See also Owen's commentary on Hebrews where he discussed the "sacerdotal office of Christ" at great length, *Works*, 19: 3-259.

[77] *Works,* 5: 117, 120.

[78] *Works,* 5: 121.

> himself; whatever he doth in heaven, in intercession and appearance in the presence of God, for us; it all entirely belongs unto his priestly office. And in these things alone doth the soul of a convinced sinner find relief, when he seeks after deliverance from the state of sin, and acceptance with God.[79]

While Owen does try to anticipate and answer objections, he concludes by stating that he does not want to "insist on the discussion of this inquiry," and so ends his argument.[80] Perhaps he worries that this type of discussion too easily turns to abstract concepts rather than his initial relational focus. The offices of Christ represent important theological realities, but they remain only the means for pointing to the *person* of Christ who is inextricably connected to his work. Trying to reconcile improper disputes Owen concludes: "As it is granted that justifying faith is the receiving of Christ, so *whatever belongs unto the person of Christ*, or *any office of his*, or *any acts in the discharge of any office*, that may be reduced unto any cause of our justification, the meritorious, procuring, material, formal, or manifesting cause of it, is, so far as it doth so, freely admitted to *belong unto the object of justifying faith.*"[81] In the end, Owen is most concerned to focus the eyes of faith on Christ rather than on impotent human "obedience" which others allow as a "condition" for justification. One's justification must rely on Christ rather than on oneself, otherwise there would be no escape from perpetual fear and anxiety in the Christian experience – an inevitable consequence of undervaluing the person and work of God incarnate. Again we see how Owen's scholastic training works in conjunction with his pastoral sensitivity, and as such we see how his anthroposensitive instincts affect the whole of his theological method. He feels free to use and interact with concepts and ideas within a scholastic model as long as he believes the truth is defended, but also he distances himself from scholastic terminology and method when he considers it to adversely obscure the application for Christians and their communion with God.

Justified Once or Twice?

In chapter five of *The Doctrine of Justification*, Owen investigates the theological distinction between a first and second justification. Historically the concept of "double justice" surfaces in various forms in the thought of Augustine, Alexander of Hales, Aquinas, and sixteenth century theologians like Erasmus, John

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[79] *Works*, 5: 121-122.
[80] *Works*, 5: 122.
[81] *Works*, 5: 123. Emphases mine.

Gropper, and Gaspar Contarini.[82] The 1541 Colloquy of Regensberg (Ratisbon), in which Contarini played a significant role, reveals an attempt to formulate a *duplicem iustitiam* in order to present an acceptable doctrine to both Catholic and Protestant leaders.[83] In the end this effort ultimately yields frustration. Following Regensberg, The Council of Trent (1543-63) demonstrates how the theory of double justification becomes hotly contested even within Roman theology. Cardinal Girolamo Seripando, a papal legate, argues that a chapter on *De duplici iustitia* ought to be included. In light of our discussion below in which Owen clearly associates double justification with Rome, it seems ironic that Trent ultimately decides against the inclusion of the theory of double justice because it "sounded Lutheran" and they considered it a "novelty."[84] Trent consistently argued that "the *single* formal cause [of justification] is the justice of God, not that by which He Himself is just, but that by which He makes us just" (i.e., intrinsic righteousness).[85] Moving into the seventeenth century, Robert Bellarmine's work becomes extremely important, especially since Owen bases much of his understanding of Roman theology upon it. One must remember that well into the late seventeenth century Bellarmine's writings represent arguably the most brilliant Roman Catholic presentation for Protestant interaction.[86] Bellarmine made some use of the twofold language of justification, specifically in his attempt to understand the apparent conflicting biblical data regarding this doctrine. Consequently, this idea commonly became associated with Roman theology in the eyes of seventeenth century thinkers. Later orthodox Protestants like Owen associated this language with their opponents whom they believed made works a conditional element for a believer's full and complete justification before God.

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[82] For an excellent survey of the complicated growth of this idea, see Edward Yarnold, "*Duplex iustitia*: The Sixteenth Century and the Twentieth," in *Christian Authority: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. G. R. Evans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 204-223.

[83] It is noteworthy that Owen considers "Cardinal Contarinus" his ally on the question of justification. Owen then adds, in classic Protestant paranoia, that "upon the observation of what [Contarini] had done [by writing his treatise on justification], some say he was shortly after poisoned; though I must confess I know not where they had the report." Owen also considered the pre-Trent Catholics Albertus Pighius and Antitamga Coloniense to hold similar supportive views of justification. *Works*, 5: 68. This again demonstrates how confusing the language of "double justification" is, for Pighius was one who employed such language in his effort to reconcile Luther's insights with the traditional Roman understanding.

[84] Yarnold, 217.

[85] *Council of Trent*, 33. Sixth Session, ch. 7. Emphasis mine.

[86] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, Vol. 4: *Reformation of Church and Dogma* (1300-1700), (Chicago: UCP, 1984) calls Bellarmine "the most important theologian of the Counter-Reformation," 336.

Not only did many Catholic theologians use this language, but Protestants occasionally employed it as well. For example, Martin Bucer (1491-1551) spoke of a double justification in which God both imputes and imparts righteousness: he distinguishes between these two without separating them.[87] Confusingly, William Tyndale (1494?-1536) and other Henrician Reformers sometimes apply expressions similar to a "twofold justification," but their meaning remains significantly different from the Roman conception.[88] What the early English Reformers tended to mean by the first justification was one's justification *before God* – having nothing to do with one's obedience – while a second justification was *before one's fellow-man* – which included the believer's good works as testimony to his conversion. However, by the early part of the seventeenth century, when some later Protestant writers are using this language, they face the accusation of advancing a Roman understanding of justification. The controversy regarding Richard Montague's (1577-1641) books demonstrate this growing association. Montague's use and development of a first and second justification is severely attacked, bringing the charge that he is presenting a Roman rather than Protestant view of justification.[89] These historic debates, while only briefly outlined here, provide the background for Owen's concerns.

From the outset Owen identifies himself with the "evangelical" understanding of justification which argues for one, rather than two justifications: The "Roman church do ground their whole doctrine of justification upon a distinction of a double justification; which they call the first and the second."[90] While elsewhere Owen's language of "most of them" reveals his awareness of some diversity among Roman

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[87] W. P. Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer* (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), 49; 48-70. Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, claims that for Bucer, "after a 'primary justification', in which man's sins are forgiven and righteousness imputed to him, there follows a 'secondary justification', in which man is made righteous," 221. Demonstrating the difficulty of interpreting this idea of double justification in Bucer, W. P. Stephen, "The Church in Bucer's Commentaries on the Epistle to the Ephesians," in *Martin Bucer,* ed. David F. Wright (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 48, strongly disagrees with McGrath's representation of Bucer. Owen likewise notes the confusion caused in how Bucer "expressed" himself, *Works*, 5: 231-233.

[88] Carl Trueman, *Luther's Legacy: Salvation and English Reformers 1525-1556* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 102-103, 140-42, 283; *contra.* W. A. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants 1520-35* (London: YUP, 1964), 66-68, 87, 108-09, 166-68, 201-02.

[89] Montague's books include *A Gagg for the Gospell? No: A New Gagg for an Old Goose* (London, 1624) and *Appello Caesarem* (London, 1625). The attack against him comes from the anonymous work, *A Dangerous Plot Discovered by A Discourse Wherein is proved, That, Mr Richard Montague . . . Laboureth to bring in the Faith of Rome, and Arminius; under the name and pretence of the doctrine and faith of the church of England* (London, 1626). For a history of this debate see Allison, 57-61.

theologians, he considers the above-mentioned view most representative of the Roman Church as a whole.[91] Alister McGrath highlights the misunderstanding – even surfacing in twentieth century scholarship – regarding how many Catholic theologians developed the idea of "double righteousness." He emphatically argues that this should not be understood as a doctrine of "double justification." Much of this confusion seems to date back to Bellarmine and his attempt to discredit the theologians at Regensburg.[92] Thankfully recent scholarship has provided a more accurate historical assessment of the doctrine of "double righteousness." Yet for our purposes we must acknowledge that Owen – relying mostly upon Bellarmine – assumes that Roman teaching does in fact hold, implicitly or explicitly, a doctrine of double justification. Therefore we must use *Owen's* conception of the Roman position, otherwise we risk imposing our modern understanding upon him.

Owen believes that Roman theologians contend that the first justification is the "infusion or the communication unto us of an inherent principle or habit of grace or charity."[93] With this infusion, they think "original sin is extinguished, and all habits of sin are expelled." To be justified in this way is to rely totally upon Christ and his merits. While many of the medieval scholastics would speak of preparation for salvation and of *meritum de congruo* (half merit), Owen notes that the Council of Trent tried to avoid this language of merit when discussing the first justification.[94] For the most part, faith is what is needed as preparation, not merit.

Roman theologians principally see this justification by faith as "a habit of grace, expelling sin and making us acceptable to God." It is to this justification to which they believe the Pauline literature refers. The second justification, as Owen constructs the Roman view, is the result of the first. In this second justification, the "proper formal cause" is "good works, proceeding from this principle [i.e., habit] of grace and love."[95] It is here that believers become righteous and therefore "merit

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[90] To follow his arguments, see *Works*, 5: 137-162.

[91] See *Works*, 5: 139.

[92] McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 244-45.

[93] *Works*, 5: 137.

[94] Cf. *Works* 5: 151, where Owen appreciates how some Catholic theologians have tried to set aside "that ambiguous term merit."

[95] *Works*, 5: 138.

eternal life." This justification is that to which the epistle of James refers.[96] Using this concept of double justification, Roman theologians believe they have faithfully reconciled the apparent contradictions of Paul and James. Paul's language of being justified apart from the works of the law represents the first justification, whereas James' emphasis on being justified by one's works represents the second justification. At this point Owen argues primarily against Bellarmine and the conclusions of the Council of Trent.

So what does Owen see lying behind this twofold distinction? The problem with both Bellarmine and Trent is that they mistakenly allow human works to play a role in justification, even if it is only after one is initially justified. Thus, when Owen claims that Trent teaches a sort of 'double justification,' he refers to Session 6 chapter 10. This chapter deals with the "increase of the justification received."[97] Trent claims that those who have been "justified and made the friends and domestics of God . . . they, through the observance of the commandments of God and of the Church, faith *cooperating with good works, increase* in that justice received through the grace of Christ and are *further justified.*"[98] Between this section of Trent and Bellarmine's attempt to reconcile Paul and James, Owen seems convinced that Rome improperly combines justification and sanctification.[99] According to the Oxford theologian, this is yet another example of unnecessary complication introduced into the simplicity of the message. Here we find Owen's latent frustration with the Medievalists who, he believes, unnecessarily multiplied theological distinctions, inevitably causing greater distortion. Distinguishing between a 'first' and 'second' justification similarly brought "confusion" rather than clarity. However, lest his reader form the wrong impression, Owen does not think that this debate centers simply upon a semantic difference – real theological consequences follow the Catholic presentation.

> Justification through the free grace of God, by faith in the blood of Christ, is evacuated by [Rome's view]. Sanctification is turned into a justification, and corrupted by making the fruits of it meritorious. The nature of evangelical justification, consisting in the gratuitous pardon of sin and the imputation of

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[96] Cf. Bellarmine, 1.17a, 3.33e, 3.309h, 3.266d, 4.204, 4.236-238, 4.267-68, etc. Cf. the controversial Protestant attempt to reconcile Paul and James in George Bull, *Harmonia Apostolica,* trans. Thomas Wilkinson, 2 ed. (Oxford: John Henry Parker, repr. 1844), esp. 43-220. Bull tends to elevate faith to the status of a work, a view strongly opposed by Owen.

[97] See *Council of Trent*, 36.

[98] See *Council of Trent*, 36. Emphasis mine.

[99] *Works*, 5: 138. This distinction primarily goes back to Melanchthon and the development of forensic justification.

> righteousness . . . and the declaration of a believing sinner to be righteous thereon . . . is utterly defeated.[100]

Owen believes that when the Roman position – as he understands it – is theologically applied, it causes the very core of Christ's atoning work to be without power or effect.[101] Consequently, the believer finds himself more and more dependent upon his own acts of obedience as the securing force by which he hopes to lay claim to life eternal. From Owen's theological viewpoint, such a disastrous consequence must grow out of an overly confident perception of fallen humanity.

To be sure, Owen recognizes a "twofold" justification in scripture, one by the works of the law, the other by grace through faith.[102] However, he believes that every reader of scripture will see that these "ways" are obviously opposed; humanity must be justified by one or the other, but not by both.[103] In Owen's mind this biblical distinction differs from the one Rome makes, for one is justified either by the law or by grace through faith. There cannot be a mixture in which Christ does part of the work and the Christian does the rest. Either a person merits salvation himself, or he looks outside of himself to another. To make his point clear, Owen argues that his opponents' view of a second justification "is no way applicable unto what the apostle James" is writing about: they have misunderstood and misapplied James, thus melding James' and Paul's teaching together inappropriately. Whereas Paul was writing primarily to answer questions about how one might be accepted before God, James was addressing those who wrongly *presumed* justification, and so thought "there was nothing more needful unto them that they might be saved."[104] The confusion comes when people fail to realize that Paul and James are speaking of different kinds of *faith*: the one is alive (i.e., Paul), the other is dead (i.e., James). James is not writing about two kings of justification, rather, he is focusing on a lifeless *faith* (i.e., the "one boasting of faith" is actually "dead"). Consequently, this

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[100] *Works*, 5: 138.

[101] Roman theology tends to make a distinction between sin and concupiscence. Accordingly, the justified still struggle with concupiscence, but technically "sin" is remitted while grace is infused. This doctrine makes little sense to a Protestant working with the presupposition that the believer can be *simul iustus et peccator*. Such confusion means that the theologians often talk past one another. See P. De Letter, 81-88.

[102] *Works*, 5: 139.

[103] In his discussion on "Mosaic theology" and the rise of idolatry, Owen argues that this is what caused devastating consequences for Israel: they gave up the ideas of a gratuitous justification and eternal salvation based on the coming Messiah's merits and mediation ("Justificationem gratuitam et salutem aeternam Messiae meritis obtinendam et mediatione"), instead seeking a righteousness through works of the law and by observing ceremonially-correct rituals, *Works*, 17: 345 (*BT*, 487).

Puritan believes that not even Rome can fairly understand James as supporting a second justification: "But he who hath the first justification, by the confession of our adversaries, hath a true, living faith, formed and enlivened by charity."[105] Owen also points out that both Paul and James, when discussing justification before God, refer to Abraham as their example of true faith.[106]

For Owen, Rome's mistake occurs when they mix their views of James and Paul together, creating a twofold justification that leaves the human with an insurmountable burden. If accepted, this view limits the value and effectiveness of Christ's work, making it only the basis for the infusion of a habit, after which man is left to rely on his own efforts to maintain and merit his salvation.[107] In Owen's construction of Roman theology, the logical outcome of their position is that the first justification is all of grace, but the second justification is all of human works. Christ's work is figured as incomplete, and human merit provides the necessary addition for final entrance into glory.

Making a more experiential argument, Owen contends that those who argue for a second justification, if they are truly led by the Spirit and are convinced of their own sin, will quickly see that their arguments cannot hold: "their own personal righteousness will sink in their minds like water at the return of the tide, and leave nothing but mud and defilement behind them."[108] Ultimately, this distinction leaves people with no justification at all. Rome's difficulty is that their understanding of the first justification is too weak and incomplete. It limited the efficacy of Christ's blood, and Owen contends that this does not do justice to scripture's view of the atonement.[109] Here we intentionally use the language of *limited* to show how traditionally negative presentations of Owen's view of the atonement fail to account for the positive nature of his argument. While Owen surely held a view of 'limited atonement' as applied to those for whom Christ died, he relentlessly argued for the *unlimited* soteriological sufficiency of the atonement for believers. In other words, Owen would never limit the atonement's effectiveness so that there were still

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[104] *Works*, 5: 387-88.

[105] *Works*, 5: 142, 390-91.

[106] *Works*, 5: 142.

[107] In fairness to their position, Roman theologians speak of "cooperation" with God rather than relying on oneself.

[108] *Works*, 5: 141.

necessary requirements for believers to fulfil in order to enjoy eternal communion with God. Owen believed his Roman opponents had perpetuated such a 'limit': Christ's atonement pardoned sins initially and infused one with a new habit, but this alone could not guarantee sinners a blessed eternal life – a consequence that Owen thought greatly limited the atonement in an unacceptable manner.

A correct understanding of the first justification would make a discussion of a second unnecessary. For the one true justification has many consequences:[110] 1) forgiveness of sin, 2) the believer made[111] righteous, 3) free from condemnation, judgement and death, 4) reconciled to God 5) enjoys peace with God through his love, 6) enjoys adoption and all of its privileges, 7) receives a right and title unto the whole inheritance of glory, 8) with eternal life as the consequence of all of the above.[112] If these are the results of justification, then there cannot be either a need or a possibility for a second justification. Thus Owen concludes: "Wherefore it is evident, that either the first justification overthrows the second, rendering it needless; or the second destroys the first, by taking away what essentially belongs unto it."[113]

Important anthropological questions regarding Christian experience arise from this view of two justifications. Both Roman and Protestant theologians agree that salvation without faith and the grace of God is impossible. Debate nevertheless arises, according to Owen, when the believer attempts to live out his theology. How does one *remain* (or, in the language of the Seventeenth century, *continue to be*) justified before God?

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[109] For Owen's early work on the atonement, where he argues that the atonement secures the redemption of those for whom Christ died, see his *Salus Electorum, Sanguius Jesu; or The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647), *Works*, 10: 139-428.

[110] *Works*, 5: 142 for the list and scripture references.

[111] While the language "made" can sound Roman, Owen uses proof texts (Rom. 5: 19, 10: 4) that he believes clearly points to imputed, not inherent righteousness. See *Works*, 5: 57, 135, esp. 333-44.

[112] In a private letter written by Thomas Barlow – the former tutor and friend of Owen – written in 1678 (one year after Owen's book is published), an uncanny similarity is apparent. See T. Barlow, *Two Letters . . . Concerning Justification by Faith only.* (London, 1701), 33-34. Barlow writes:

i. By Faith . . . we receive Christ, and are made the sons of God [cf.Owen #6].
ii. By Faith Christ lives in us, and we live [cf. #2?].
iii. By Faith we receive remission of all our sins [cf. #1].
iv. And freedom from condemnation [cf. #3].
v. And justification [cf. #4].
vi. By faith we receive the Holy Spirit [cf. #7?].
vii. And peace with God [cf. #5].
viii. And eternal life [cf. #8].

[113] *Works*, 5: 143.

The Roman view asserts that justification initially occurs through the gift of a new *habitus* of *caritas* whereby all of a person's sins are forgiven and he is made holy. This initial justification occurs in baptism. Once in this state, the person must seek to maintain his holiness through co-operation with God. Since believers sometimes yield to concupiscence or may commit a mortal sin, the sacraments serve as the means by which they are again renewed and made holy. Trent states: "Those who through sin have forfeited the received grace of justification, can *again be justified* when, moved by God, they exert themselves to obtain through the sacrament of penance the recovery, by the merits of Christ, of the grace lost."[114] To later Protestant readers like Owen, this seems to communicate that the burden ultimately remains upon the believer to complete his justification lest he fall from the Faith. Rome's view ought not be misunderstood as asserting either that God does not assist believers to live without sin, or that God is unwilling to forgive sins. For this reason Christ instituted the Church as the primary means for the Christian to experience forgiveness of sins and their continuation in justification (i.e., baptism and penance). However, Rome maintains that the believer should never "boast of his confidence and certainty of the remission of sins." Believers must recognize that "God does not forsake those who have been once justified by His grace, *unless He be first forsaken by them.*"[115]

Owen opposes what he perceives to be the erroneous conclusions of the Roman doctrine. The believer can only continue to be "justified" because of the person and work of Christ – at this point his Roman opponents would agree. It is the incarnate one whose life, death, and resurrection has made the justified life imaginable. Significantly for Owen, Christ not only makes the forgiveness of sins possible, but also the imputation of righteousness. This forensic emphasis constructs justification as completely dependent upon God, which has implications for living out the Christian experience. Since God is the one who justifies, "the continuation of our justification is his act also."[116] The frail human finds security not in himself, but in God's character (i.e., immutability and faithfulness), the "efficacy of his grace," in the complete satisfaction accomplished in the "propitiation of Christ," in Christ's continued heavenly intercession, and in the "irrevocable grant" of the Holy Spirit to

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[114] *Council of Trent*, 39. Sixth Session, ch. 14. Emphasis mine.
[115] *Council of Trent*, 35, 37. Emphasis mine.
[116] *Works*, 5: 147-148.

believers. These objective realities ground a Christian's confidence that he will persevere to the end. It may be fair to summarize Owen's massive volume (666 pages), *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* (1654), as stressing the Christian's ultimate comfort of assurance as coming primarily from *God's* perseverance rather than his own.[117] While Owen does not hesitate to call the Christian to righteous living, he nevertheless believes that the only means by which a person can continue to be acceptable before God come from God himself. Owen is far too skeptical of human potential to ever trust in will power as a path to righteous Christian living. Sanctification is as much an act of God's grace toward the sinner as is his justification, a point sometimes confused by other Protestants.[118]

Given the above background, Owen contends that continuing securely in the justified life comes solely through the person and work of Christ and not from personal holiness. Yet, how does the Christian deal with sins committed since original justification? This is the question which Owen thinks encapsulates a major difference between how Rome and the Protestants work out their doctrines of justification. According to Owen, one must never plead his own righteousness. On this point he believes the Catholic theologians appear weakest, as their theology seems inconsistent with their practice.

While Owen may have oversimplified his opponents' position by imposing his foreign Protestant model upon Roman theologians, for our purposes we must concentrate on Owen's anthroposensitive method. Three pieces of evidence sufficiently represent his argument against Rome's allowance for the believer's obedience to play even a minor role in securing and maintaining his justification before God.

First, Christian experience testifies against such claims of personal vindication. Owen wonders if any true believer would ask for their sins to be forgiven because of his own righteousness: "Do they [Roman theologians] leave the

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[117] *Works*, 11. In this work Owen spends considerable time focusing his readers' attention on God's immutability, the significance of the mediation and intercession of Jesus Christ, and the reality of the indwelling of the Spirit.

[118] Confusion at this point manifests itself in the preaching and writings of those who represent the "holy living" group, as represented by Jeremy Taylor. Cf. Allison, 63-95. Taylor's doctrinal and devotional writings are compiled in the set, *The Whole Works with a Life of the Author and a critical Examination of his Writings*, 15 vols. (London, 1828).

prayer of the publican, and betake themselves unto that of the Pharisee?"[119] For Owen, Christian experience strongly testifies against any hope for continuation in a justified state apart from the external righteousness of Christ received solely by faith.

Second, Owen appeals to scripture, particularly 1 John 2:1-2: "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and he is the propitiation for our sins." From this Owen deduces that believers are not to sin, while tragically noting that all Christians inevitably do. So how does the Apostle John deal with this dilemma? Again Owen emphasizes Christ's priestly office as both sacrifice and intercessor. Christ not only offers himself in the believer's stead, but also empowers the believer through his continual heavenly prayers. Christ proves to be the right object of faith both initially and continually in the Christian's experience. "So our whole progress in our justified estate, in all the degrees of it, is ascribed unto faith alone."[120] "Duties" serve the Christian, not for justification, but to help keep him "preserved" from "those things which are contrary unto" his justification. In other words, although the Christian's actions are a means for healthy spirituality, they never provide the grounding of his initial or continued acceptance before God.[121] From here Owen cites abundant scriptural references which he thinks demonstrate how Christ's atonement secures one's justification which is received through faith.[122]

Lest one think that Owen completely misrepresents his Roman opponents regarding the relationship between Christ and one's "second justification," a few clarifications regarding this second point must be noted. Owen recognizes that there

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[119] *Works*, 5:148. Earlier English Protestant writers often used this type of argument – obviously their Roman opponents would claim this is a gross misrepresentation of their view. E.g., Davenant, *A Treatise on Justification, or the Disputatio de Justinita Habituali et Actuali* (London, orig. 1631, reprint 1844, trans. Josiah Allport), 1: 228, argues that no Catholic theologian speaks "of their own inherent righteousness before the Divine tribunal, but fly full of fear to the mercy and acceptance of God in Christ. But if they were willing to stand by their doctrine, they must either depend upon this formal cause, or give up all hope of salvation . . . let us hear how little they attribute to this inherent righteousness, which they speak, not in a spirit of contention, but under a conviction of conscience." Barlow makes the same point to his fellow Anglican opponent: "Sir, whatever opinion we may have (at present) of justification by our good works, and our continuation of that justice by them; yet when we shall appear, (as one day we must) at the dreadful tribunal of our just god; we shall (I believe) be of Bellarmines opinion, (who had been earnest for justification by works) and say (as upon more serious and second thoughts) he did, Propter presentis vitæ incertitudinem, Tutissimum est, in Solo Christo recumbere, etc," *Two Letters*, 76.

[120] *Works*, 5: 149. Contra *Council of Trent*: "Wherefore, no one ought to flatter himself with faith alone thinking that by faith alone he is made an heir and will obtain the inheritance, even though he suffer not with Christ," 37.

[121] Cf. *Council of Trent*, 39.

[122] E.g., Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38-39; Gal. 2:20, 21, see *Works*, 5: 150

are some theologians from the "Roman school" who maintain a role for Christ's merits even beyond a person's first justification. These theologians would not claim that God first justifies a person and then, once initially justified, abandons him to his own efforts. Referring to Vasquez as an example, Owen points out how these theologians want to see God's grace and Christ's merit as having application on a person's second justification. Here the medieval idea of *facere quod in se est* manifests itself. Man's natural powers are never enough to achieve perfect righteousness while on earth, a fact that does not escape God's notice. Therefore the believer must simply do his best. Although the believer's merits, *per se*, are weak and imperfect, God's grace makes up the difference. Owen writes: "for it is on the account of the righteousness of Christ, they [i.e. the Roman school] say, that our own works, or imperfect obedience, is so accepted with God, as that the continuation of our justification depends thereon."[123] In other words, his opponents would think it unfair to claim that their position makes one's continual state of justification solely dependent upon man's works, for *God* makes man's works acceptable – *Christ* makes up the deficiency. This distinction makes no substantial difference to Owen.

Justification, in Owen's model, includes both "absolute justification" and the continuation of justification. If the sinner's works have *any* role in justification, then the biblical model and Christian experience are lost. Thus, Paul in Romans 5:1-3 speaks of how the Christian gains access to God (i.e. absolute justification), how he remains standing in this experience of grace (i.e., continuation), and finally, how the believer "glories" in this position (i.e., "assurance of that continuation"). Significantly, "all these [Paul] ascribeth equally unto faith, without the intermixture of any other cause or condition."[124]

Third, Owen appeals to the experience of believers in scripture as representatives that testify to his claims regarding justification and faith. Abraham and David serve as his two examples. Just as Abraham is absolutely justified by his faith initially, his continued justification likewise results from his faith. Similarly, David's justification depends completely on his faith rather than on his works.[125]

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[123] *Works*, 5: 151.

[124] *Works*, 5: 151.

[125] Noticeably Owen does not here refer to James 2:24, which seems to claim that Abraham was justified by works. The reader must wait for an extensive analysis of this apparent contradiction in chapter 20.

Concluding this detailed discussion regarding "two justifications," Owen holds that there is "but one justification . . . and that is the justification of an ungodly person by faith."[126] He believes that a logical and biblical disaster results from holding any other causes for a second justification than that which caused the first. In his view, those who maintain a distinction between a first and second justification inevitably diminish the person and work of Christ. The complications introduced by such a distinction lead once again to confusion of the simple faith in Christ and an appreciation of his atoning work.

Imputation: Receiving the Benefits of Christ

Owen presents his view of imputation by carefully diagramming his position in contrast to the straw men presented by his opponents – who are sometimes Protestants.[127] First, he believes that imputation *does not* mean to judge or esteem people to be righteous "who truly and really are not so."[128] Here he is trying to counter the "Papists" who "cry out 'ad ravim' [till they are hoarse,] that we affirm God to esteem them to be righteous who are wicked, sinful, and polluted." Second, Owen *does not* think that God can simply declare a person to be righteous, as if the words alone would change the actual state of affairs. Common caricatures occur at this point, especially with theologians less attentive than Owen. In carelessness they seem to present God as completely arbitrary, pronouncing the wicked to be holy for no reason other than the random whims of the divine. According to Owen, "God declares no man to be righteous but him who is so." This statement begs the question of how the unrighteous ever change their standing before God. If God cannot say the words and make it so, what hope is there for people, even repentant people, to escape their sinful lapses?

Before answering such questions Owen makes one more clarification, specifically and carefully showing his disagreement with Rome. Imputation of

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[126] *Works*, 5: 152.

[127] E.g., Thomas Hotchkis, *A Discourse Concerning the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness to us, and our Sins to him* (London, 1675), 142. In this work Hotchkis attacks Owen's view of the imputation of Christ's righteousness and accuses Owen of antinomianism. Hotchkis is here attacking Owen's *Of Communion*, published in 1657. After Owen's *Justification* was published in 1677, Hotchkis wrote *A Postscript, Containing the Authors Vindication of Himself and the Doctrine from the Imputations of Dr. John Owen* (London: 1678), which reads as a feisty sample of seventeenth century theological mudslinging.

[128] See *Works*, 5: 173 for this discussion.

righteousness, he believes, "is not the transmission or transfusion of the righteousness of another into them that are to be justified, that they should become perfectly and inherently righteous thereby; for it is impossible that the righteousness of one should be transfused into another, to become his subjectively and inherently."[129] Here Owen is resisting the scholastic conception of the infusion of habitual grace whereby believers become inherently righteous. Even so, he argues elsewhere that while forgiveness does allow a person to be "not guilty," it alone is insufficient grounds for his entrance into eternal life: "we must also be actually righteous," not only must sin be dealt with, but "all righteousness is to be fulfilled."[130] The negative imputation of sins is necessary, but the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers is equally important.[131]

Given these clarifications, Owen presents a *positive* conception of imputation, and in so doing we see his guiding thesis for how he develops this doctrine through to the end of the book.

> Imputation is an act of God 'ex mea gratia,' – of his mere love and grace; whereby, on the consideration of the mediation of Christ, he makes an effectual grant and donation of a true, real, perfect righteousness, even that of Christ himself, unto all that do believe; and accounting it as theirs, on his own gracious act, both absolves them from sin and granteth them right and title unto eternal life.[132]

In order to understand what is behind this statement one needs to appreciate Owen's heightened emphasis on the mystical union between the believer and Christ.[133] C. F. Allison rightly argues that "Owen places more explicit emphasis on the union with Christ than even Downame does, and perhaps more than anyone of the period with the exception of John Donne."[134] This emphasis is clearly shown when Owen addresses the imputation of believers' sins to Christ. As noted throughout our study, Owen continually emphasizes the *person* of Christ since he is the means of reconciling the divine and human. When it comes to imputation – a doctrine closely connected with

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[129] *Works*, 5: 173.

[130] *Works*, 2: 104-5. "The old quarrel may be laid aside, and yet no new friendship begun; we may be not sinners, and yet not be so far righteous as to have a right to the kingdom of heaven," *Works* 2: 170.

[131] Cf. *Works*, 9: 597-99, a unique sacramental discourse preached on this theme sometime in late 1675 or early 1676, the same period when Owen's work on justification is either being written, or had recently been completed and was at the publisher.

[132] *Works*, 5: 173.

[133] For an excellent overview of Owen's understanding of "Union with Christ: The Channel of Grace," see Gleason, 89-95.

[134] Allison, 175.

the work of Christ – Owen again finds himself stressing Christ's person. Only here he does so in terms of the mystical union that exists between Christ and his Church. The means by which this union is accomplished is unquestionably the "uniting efficacy of the Holy Spirit."[135] Using 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Owen refers to Christ as the head and believers as the various members of that same person. Christ is not the head of one body while Christians are the limbs of another; rather, Christ and believers are inexplicably united.[136] Here we sense echoes of Calvin and Luther's conception of the "wondrous exchange" whereby, because of the union between Christ and believers, "Christ takes upon Himself what is ours, and transfers to us what is His own."[137]

Only by means of this background can one understand Owen's development of justification, both positively and negatively. Since believers are part of the very "body" of Christ, their sins can be imputed to him; likewise, his righteousness can be imputed to them. Having stated his position, Owen seeks historical validation. Although Reformers like Calvin – with their heavy emphasis on union – would be a rich source for arguing his point, Owen instead turns to Patristic authors as his primary references.[138] In light of contemporary scholarship's tendency to argue that the doctrine of imputation was, for the most part, a novel idea that grew out of the Reformation, Owen's use of the patristics is fascinating.[139] Owen quotes from various sources: a sermon of Leo's, an epistle of Augustine, as well as further testimonies from Irenaeus, Origen, Cyprian, and Athanasius. Through these

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135 *Works*, 5: 176.

136 *Works*, 5: 176. In his *LC and GC* (1648), Owen claims that the first "privilege of believers" is "union with Christ," followed by five others, which include adoption, communion of saints, etc. See *Works*, 1: 469, 489.

137 Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1995), 147. Cf. B. A. Gerrish's study of the 'happy exchange' in Luther and Calvin, "Atonement and 'Saving Faith,'" *TT* 17, no. 2 (1960): 181-91. Gerrish claims that while the question of how the exchange takes place is unclear, what is clear for both is what is exchanged: "Christ's righteousness is exchanged for the believer's sin," 182.

138 When debating the imputation of Christ's righteousness elsewhere, Owen clearly maintains that he has the "testimony of Scripture" and "the judgement of the catholic church of Christ on my side," *Works*, 2: 361. Therefore he views his opponent, William Sherlock, as being the theological novice.

139 E.g., Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, argues that while the Reformation represents a rediscovery of Augustinian theology, the Reformers' *use* of Augustine is new: "The most accurate description of the doctrines of justification associated with the Reformed and Lutheran churches from 1530 onwards is that they represent a radically new interpretation of the Pauline concept of 'imputed righteousness' set within an Augustinian soteriological framework," 189; cf. Peter Toon, *Justification and Sanctification* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1983). While Toon may recognize the non-imputation of sin in pre-reformation thought (e.g., 50), he argues against any traces of a positive imputation of righteousness.

quotations Owen highlights a special connection between Christ and the Church. For example, Augustine writes: "We hear the voice of the body from the mouth of the head. The church suffered in him when he suffered for the church; as he suffers in the church when the church suffereth for him."[140] With the incarnation, Christ not only identifies with believers but he also unites himself by his Spirit to them, thus making imputation possible. Owen does not view himself or this teaching (i.e., imputation) as new; rather he believes the ancient authors affirm the implications of this doctrine, even if they did not clothe it in the sixteenth century Reformation language of imputation. To demonstrate this, Owen looks to a time before Augustine to examine the Greek Father Irenaeus' view of recapitulation: "Christ has summed up in himself all peoples scattered abroad since Adam, the source of human beings. Therefore, Paul called Adam himself a type of the one to come."[141] The quote from Origen, which Owen admits is enigmatic, claims that the soul of the first Adam was the soul of Christ: this enables one to deduce the idea of mystical relations. With mystical relations comes the possibility for imputation in Owen's mind. The theme that develops from these chosen quotations is Christ's unique relationship to believers, especially in terms of suffering. So Cyprian adds, "He bare us" – to which Owen interestingly adds a clarification for his readers, "or suffered in our *person*" – "when he bare our sins."[142]

Since these quotations serve to add authority, it is noteworthy that Owen finds in Eusebius the best summation of what he himself wants to argue for. After quoting 18 lines of Eusebius in Greek, Owen – in a somewhat unusual gesture – translates the entire selection for his reader. He does not want anyone to miss the essence of what this early father says, for Owen believes his "present discourse is declared fully therein." This type of argument and appeal was common among Post-Reformation Reformed scholastics who wanted to emphasize the catholicity of their teaching; theological novelty rarely motivates Owen.

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[140] *Works,* 5: 176. Here Owen is quoting from Augustine, Epistle cxx., *ad Honoratum.*: "Audimus vocem corporis ex ore capitis. Ecclesia in illo patienbatur, quando pro eccelsia patiebatur, etc."

[141] "Christus omnes gentes exinde ab Adam dispersas, et generationem hominum in semet ipso recapitulatus est; unde a Paulo typus futuri dictus est ipse Adam," *Works*, 5: 176. Owen's book refers to Irenaeus [assuming *Against Heresies*] lib. iii. cap. 33, but current editions of Irenaeus show Book three with only 25 chapters. In more recent editions [vol. 1 in *ANF*] this quotation comes from III.22.2.

In this selection Owen chooses from Eusebius the theme already noted above is reiterated, only in more detail.[143] Christ is able to take on the sins of others because they are part of his body. Since our overarching concern remains anthropology, the connection that Eusebius – and Owen through him – draws between the incarnation and the taking on of sin (imputation of sin according to Owen) stands out. Jesus took the form of a servant (cf. Phil. 2:7), in order to "be joined unto the common habitation of us all in the same nature." As God incarnate, Jesus was mysteriously able to take not only other humans' "sorrows," but also the "labors of the suffering members on him." God, it appears, could not have accomplished this if he did not first condescend through the incarnation. Again this resembles Anselm's logic that humanity owed a debt, but only a God-Man could pay. Through his incarnation, Jesus shatters this difficulty by living "according to the laws of humanity," which allowed him to "bare our sorrow and labour for us."[144] In the end, Owen clearly believes that this union – making Christ and his Church one person – must ground any discussion of the imputation of sins, and by implication, the imputation of righteousness.

Owen acknowledges that many will raise questions about the meaning of "person" as employed here.[145] Wanting to avoid disputes about person-hood in the categories of his day (i.e., natural, legal, political, civil), he encourages his readers to accept mystical language. He relies on diverse biblical imagery which seems to support such usage (e.g., Eph. 5:25-32; 1 Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:15; Col. 2:19; John 15:1-2; Rom. 5:12). These proof texts approach the idea from a variety of perspectives, including the relationship between a husband and wife, between the head and the rest of the body, and even between a vine and its branches. Difficulties arise when union with Christ becomes limited to one of the analogies. Therefore Owen guards the flexibility of this mystical language and spends considerable time developing the causes and grounds for such a union.[146]

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[142] "Nos omnes portabat Christus; qui et peccata nostra portabat," *Works*, 5: 176-177, emphasis mine. See Cyprian, "Epistle 62," §13, in vol. 5 *ANF*. Cf. Owen cites Athanasius as simply saying "we suffered in him."

[143] For Eusebius, see his *Demonstratio Evangelica,* X.1.

[144] *Works*, 5: 177.

[145] *Works*, 5: 178 ff.

[146] For how Owen accomplishes this, see esp. *Works*, 5: 179-205. The three causes he highlights are: 1) the "spring" of this union is grounded in the "eternal compact" that took place between the Father and the Son and made "effectual by the Holy Spirit" regarding the "recovery and salvation of mankind." 2) The human nature that Jesus thus had to assume was "predestined unto grace and glory." 3) This "grace and glory" included what was a) "peculiar unto himself" and b)

While related, the imputation of human sins to Christ and the imputation of his righteousness to believers are not identical in nature. In fact, theological disaster results when this assumption is made. According to Owen, the great difference between the two imputations is that Christ "cannot in the same manner be said to be made a sinner by the one as we are made righteous by the other."[147] Behind this concern lies Owen's conception of the holiness and justice of God. If Christ takes upon himself the sin of humanity forever, never actually ridding both the world and himself of it, then *he* could no longer enjoy communion with the Father since God cannot be in the presence of sin. To bar Christ from the presence of the Father is to divide the triune God – an unthinkable proposition for this Puritan divine. While believers find security in the fact that the imputed righteousness of Christ remains theirs forever, "our sin was imputed unto him only for a season, not absolutely." Even as the incarnation was necessary for God to take the sins of humanity unto himself, it was by means of the cross (Owen uses Pauline language of becoming a "curse for us") that sins were finally dealt with.[148] One might expect Owen to move forward from this point onto how the resurrection and ascension affected the world but this is not the case. Instead he begins another chapter, once again maneuvering his way through the various views of justification.

Since Owen's extended account of imputation – and all of the caveats that go along with it – moves well beyond the scope of our study, we shall conclude by briefly noting another way in which he relates the person of Christ to imputation.[149] In this context he uses the language of *person* to speak less about mystical union and more about the individual person Jesus Christ. Owen argues that a proper conception of the relationship between the human and divine natures of Christ is necessary to arrive at a biblical possibility for the imputation of Christ's righteousness. This brief section builds upon our last chapter's more narrow focus on the humanity of Christ.

"communicated, by and through him, unto the church." It is in this context that he becomes involved in a lengthy discussion of surety and covenant theology. See Wong, 234 ff., 373-76.

[147] *Works*, 5: 203.

[148] *Works*, 5: 204, from Gal. 3:13-14. Cf. God "hath found out to exercise grace and satisfy justice at the same time, in and by the same person. Sin shall be punished, all sin, yet grace exercised; sinners shall be saved, yet justice exalted; – all in the cross of Christ," *Works*, 20: 410.

[149] Owen spends the rest of the treatise dealing with objections to imputation, providing a lengthy biblical exposition of every passage which he believes relates to this topic, and finally concluding with an attempt to explain the apparent differences between Paul and James regarding justification.

This discussion occurs within the context of Owen's response to Socinus, who claims that Christ cannot impute his righteousness to others.[150] Socinus objects to the idea of imputation of righteousness on the grounds that all of Christ's obedience was necessary and obligatory for himself.[151] Consequently, Christ's personal obedience could not be imputed unto others.[152] Owen responds by arguing that Christ's obedience must be understood in terms of his role as the "mediator of the covenant," and as such Christ's obedience was "of his person." Deciphering this somewhat strange language requires close analysis.

Owen's incarnational theology gives him categories with which he can address the problem raised by Socinus. Whereas Socinus denies the divine nature of Jesus prior to the resurrection, Owen fully affirms both the divine and human natures of Christ. In so doing, Owen believes that Jesus was both 1) fully obedient unto the law as required of all humanity and yet 2) still able to "communicate" his righteousness to others on account of the unique relationship between his two natures.[153] Thus, Jesus' obedience was "performed in the human nature; but the *person* of Christ was he that performed it." This peculiar statement makes sense in light of the argument that follows it:

> As in the person of a man, some of his acts, as to the immediate principle of operation, are acts of the body, and some are so of the soul; yet, in their performance and accomplishment, are they the acts of the *person*: so the acts of Christ in his mediation, as to their ἐνέργηματα, or immediate operation, were the actings of his distinct natures, - some of the divine and some of the human, immediately; but as unto their ἀποτελέσματα, and the perfecting efficacy of them, they were the acts of his *whole person*.[154]

Yet again we see that the *person* of Christ must include both his divine and human natures. Following classic orthodox formulations, Owen wants to maintain unity while at the same time making distinctions. He answers Socinus by arguing both that the "obedience of Christ" was truly the "obedience of the Son of God" and also that "the Son of God was never absolutely made ὑπό νόμον" (i.e., under the law). In

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[150] To follow the argument, see *Works*, 5: 251 ff.

[151] Cf. *RC*, V .8 [p. 315].

[152] Cf. *Works*, 19: 196-97, where Owen succinctly compares his understanding of Christ's priestly work of oblation with that of Socinus. See Gomes for a study of Socinus on 'the satisfaction of Christ.'

[153] Ultimately, however, this argument would have meant little to Socinus since he denies the divine nature of the pre-risen Jesus. The chasm between Owen and Socinus can be traced to their different approaches to scripture, one governed by the hermeneutics of rationalism and the other by the boundaries of classic orthodoxy.

[154] *Works*, 5: 255. Emphasis mine.

other words, because of the relationship between the divine and human natures Jesus transcends the normal limitations assumed by person-hood. Jesus' human nature was certainly under the law, but his divine nature was never "formally" under it, resulting in a technical need to clarify the distinction between *nature* and *person*. Jesus was obedient as one who "never was, nor ever could absolutely be, made under the law in his whole person; for the divine nature cannot be subjected unto the work of its own, such as the law is, nor can it have an authoritative, commanding power over it."[155] Keeping both the unity and distinctiveness of the natures in the one person, Owen claims that imputed righteousness is "not the obedience of the human nature abstractedly, however performed in and by the human nature; but the obedience of the person of the Son of God" whose "whole person was not obliged" under the law. The two natures of Christ make it impossible for his "whole person" to be made under the law. Therefore, since his person (having two natures) was not under the law and because he did not owe "obedience for himself," Jesus *alone* was able to uniquely apply his obedience to others in order to reconcile them to God.[156] Arguing in a very Anselmian fashion Owen elsewhere concludes: "Had he not been man, he could not have suffered, –had he not been God, his suffering could not have availed either himself or us. . . the suffering of a mere man could not bear any proportion to that which in any respect was infinite."[157] Additionally, Owen describes how the obedience of Jesus was not simply a "private" matter, for Christ functioned as a "public person."[158] By this Owen means that Jesus' obedience needs to be viewed in light of his unique role as mediator between God and humanity. Here the strong emphasis on Federal theology in seventeenth century Reformed thought manifests itself. Whereas Socinus appears to believe that Jesus' atonement was for no one but himself – thus a *private* matter – Owen argues that Jesus functions as the *public* mediator whose obedience was for others and not for himself.

All of Jesus' obedience takes place in "our human nature," and this was possible only by the voluntary act of Christ. The second person of the Trinity

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155 *Works*, 5: 256.

156 This idea relates to Owen's conception of surety; he emphatically argues that God did not need a surety toward humanity, but humanity needed a surety with God. Christ alone voluntarily becomes that surety. Cf. T. Jacomb, *The Epistle to the Romans. . .* (London: 1672): "You are in Christ, not only as the members in the head (which is your Mystical Union), but as the Debtor in the Surety (which is your Legal Union)," 85. W. Sherlock, *Union and Communion with him* (1674, 1st ed.), 287-88, 290, rejects such language of surety.

157 *Works*, 2: 67.

assumed human nature with a design to redeem the Church. Humanity was loved by the Triune God who made provision for fallen creation through the incarnation.[159]

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have discussed Owen's doctrine of justification for the purpose of better understanding his anthroposensitivity. As we saw in our second chapter, humanity was originally created in the image of God. However, with the entrance of sin in the world came the need for reconciliation between God and humanity. Owen answers this need for reconciliation through his views on the incarnation (see chapter 3) and in his formulation of justification, a doctrine that he uses to emphasize both subjective and objective realities.

On the subjective side, Owen continually acknowledges the reality of human guilt, anxiety, and faithlessness. Since he views the fall as a devastating event for human history, he is fundamentally a pessimist regarding postlapsarian human nature. Working from this belief causes Owen to emphasize human *response* to God, rather than human initiative. Nevertheless, when responding to God the human must do so in a holistic fashion. Will power or mental assent is insufficient, for God stirs the whole person and as such requires a whole-souled response. Since he is not afraid to address the subjective element throughout his work, Owen's efforts are not simply academic, but purposefully pastoral.

On the objective side, Owen highlights the implications of the person and work of Christ for believers. Christ assumed human nature, as the Son of God he functioned as the great high priest for humanity and, ultimately, he alone made human reconciliation with God secure. Fallen humans cannot contribute to their justification, but they must rest solely on the accomplished work of Christ – a truth that Owen thinks will produce humble and grateful obedience to the Triune God.

In the end the subjective and objective principles guide the whole of his discussion, whether he is addressing the question of double justification or the plausibility of imputation. This chapter has served to illustrate how Owen's methodology is deeply influenced by two consistent concerns: anthropological (how can humanity have communion with God) and Christological (how can Christ provide

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[158] *Works*, 5: 260-61. Cf. *Works*, 2: 177-80.

the bridge between God and humanity). This pattern continues throughout the rest of his corpus. With this background we are now in a position to turn our attention to Owen's creative conception of human communion with the Triune God.

[159] Here, *Works*, 5: 257, Owen goes on to address the old scholastic question about the whether the incarnation would have occurred if humanity had not sinned.

Chapter 5

Human Communion with the Triune God
God's Being and Action Informing Human Response

"Absolutely nothing worthwhile for the practical life can be made out of the doctrine of the Trinity."
IMMANUEL KANT[1]

"The infinite disparity that is between God and man, made the great philosopher [i.e., Aristotle] conclude that there could be no friendship between them. Some distance in the persons holding friendship he could allow, nor could exactly determine the bounds and extent thereof; but that between God and man, in his apprehension, left no place for it."
JOHN OWEN[2]

"The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing."
ZEPH. 3:17, KJV

Introduction

It has always been a struggle for theologians to construct an orthodox conception of the Trinity that is anything other than a series of confusing abstractions. If the Trinity is central to the Christian religion, why does it often appear irrelevant to the Christian life? In the latter half of the twentieth century Karl Rahner represents a growing concern among contemporary theologians. He argues that while textbooks continue to claim the importance of the Trinity, they seem utterly unable to draw out any practical relevance: "its function in the whole dogmatic construction is not clearly perceived. It is as though this mystery has been revealed for its own sake, and that even after it has been made known to us, it remains, as a reality, locked up within itself. We make statements about it, but as a reality it has nothing to do with us at

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[1] Kant, *Der Streit der Facultaten*, A 50, 57, quoted in Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga Jr., eds. *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, ed. Thomas V. Morris, Library of Religious Philosophy, vol. 1 (Notre Dame: UNDP, 1989), 4.

[2] *Works*, 2: 8. Cf. Aristotle *EN*, 8.7 (p. 482), where he writes: "when one party is removed to a great distance, as God is, the possibility of friendship ceases."

all."[3] He concludes that this leads to the common misunderstanding that the best we can do is to learn "something 'about it' through revelation," instead of grasping the strong connection between the Trinity and humanity, since after all the Trinity "is a mystery of salvation."[4] Colin E. Gunton has likewise observed that Trinitarian theology understandably fell into disrepute because it failed "to be the living heart of worship and life." This is a disastrous consequence stemming from a neglect of right theological reflection that necessarily yields practical implications.[5] Finally, we may note the recent and relevant observations of Thomas Weinandy, who looks further into why this problem has persisted. Weinandy asserts that theologians of the past often de-emphasized the distinct personalities and roles of the three persons. As a result, countless congregants received the common impression that Christians "simply worship and relate to the undifferentiated Godhead," a problem particularly apparent in the West with its tendency to stress the One substance while neglecting the Trinity of persons.[6]

Given this contemporary discussion, looking back to John Owen's insistent application of Trinitarian ideas to the believer's life may prove of interest not only to historians, but systematic theologians as well. Does Owen's formulation of human communion with the triune God offer insights into how theologians might regain a more dynamic conception of Trinitarian action for the life of the Church and human experience? Owen's thought on the subject proves to be fairly uncharted territory. By following the structure and argument of one of Owen's devotional works, we hope to draw attention to how his anthroposensitivity manifests itself throughout his Trinitarian reflections.

In 1657 Owen wrote a treatise exploring how a believer can have a positive and active relationship with the triune God: *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, In Love, Grace, and Consolation; or, The Saints' Fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost Unfolded.*[7] This work will serve as the heart of our study, noting how Owen's theological reflections cannot be separated from his pastoral applications. While other writers have discussed this work, it has usually been presented for a popular readership (e.g., Packer and

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[3] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Burns & Oates, 1970), 14.
[4] Rahner, 14, 21.
[5] Gunton, *Trinitarian Theology*, 163.
[6] Thomas Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship: Reconceiving the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 4, 56.

Ferguson) or as a means to discuss a more narrowly defined topic (i.e., briefly in Beeke's discussion of assurance). Furthermore, although Trueman's recent study extensively interacts with Owen's Trinitarian theology, he only mentions this particular work on two occasions, leaving ample room for further treatment.[8]

We will explore this treatise of Owen's because of its unique ability to fill in the details of Owen's conception of renewed relations between God and humanity. Our analysis begins by laying the necessary groundwork for understanding Owen's emphases, including his interaction with philosophers regarding the possibility of relations between the divine and human. This naturally leads us into his definition of communion which, as we will see, must be understood within its historical context. Since communion with God is distinctly Trinitarian for Owen, we also outline his answer to how a believer approaches the One triune God. Moving beyond these preliminary discussions we follow in detail Owen's development of distinct communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In each section we observe what Owen highlights concerning the divine persons and how he encourages believers to respond appropriately. In the end we see that Owen's work is a resolute attempt to help his readers progress beyond the common human fears of divine anger and distance, and move into a peaceful and empowering relationship with their triune God.

Laying the Groundwork

The Impossible Becomes Possible

How is any form of personal communion between God and humanity possible? By asking this question yet again, and more importantly by attempting to answer it in some detail, Owen applies his anthroposensitive method, combining deep theological reflection with personal affective application. While discussions of the Trinity can become abstract and philosophical,[9] Owen attempts to provide his readers

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[7] *Works*, 2: 1-274.

[8] Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 98, 184. Despite its title, "Communion with Christ: An Exposition and Comparison of the Doctrine of Union and Communion with Christ in Calvin and the English Puritans," Won's study contains surprisingly little interaction with this particular text from Owen's corpus, 266-69. Won is primarily interested in how Owen interprets the Song of Solomon.

[9] By the end of the seventeenth century this tendency becomes more apparent as many mathematicians find themselves writing about the Trinity. E.g., Isaac Barrow (1630-1677), *A Defense of the Blessed Trinity* (1697) and the Unitarian John Wallis (1616-1703), *The Doctrine of the Blessed Trinity* (1693).

with practical insights as to how these profound truths ought to inform their relations with the triune God.

As we have noted elsewhere regarding his book on *Justification*, Owen's work commonly begins with his presuppositions regarding the fallen human condition. A person who remains in the 'natural' state into which he was born is at odds with God, not only alienated from, but also showing enmity toward his Creator.[10] With the effects of the fall upon humanity, each person lives in a state of impotency, unable to please or even respond to God.[11] There is no aspect of man which is untouched by sin; he, as the leper, receives the graphic title of "unclean."[12] Owen's emphasis upon humanity's present condition serves again as the impetus for the reader's realization that he must look beyond himself to God.

One of the best ways for this realization comes from the serious task of self-exploration, which may pave the way for true self-knowledge. Here we see the contradictory nature of self-exploration: it is only in the context of also learning about the God who created humanity that one can rightly learn about oneself. Those who do recognize that something is wrong with them often try to "disentangle the soul" through various answers, like literature and learning – both of which emerged only after the fall.[13] Owen recognizes that God has given a conscience, the law, and ultimately Christ to expose humanity's condition.[14] Each of these divine gifts ought to drive people to despair of themselves and to rely upon God. In Owen's thought, self-examination can serve as a way to turn people back to Christ, making the re-establishment of a positive relationship with the triune God possible.[15] Even so, self-knowledge alone – without an appreciation of divine action – remains insufficient for communion.

No human can experience "walking with God" in his natural condition due to the vast distance between the two parties. Even Aristotle believed that the "infinite disparity" obvious between God and humanity precludes any possibility of friendship.

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[10] *Works*, 2: 6, 106.
[11] *Works*, 2: 101.
[12] *Works*, 2: 204.
[13] *Works*, 2: 80, 111-113.
[14] *Works*, 2: 94 ff.
[15] For a brief discussion of the role of self-examination within the Puritan experience, see Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 9 ff. See also his discussion of the "Puritan Self" 226-239. He rightly claims that "One characteristic of the Puritan approach to these problems [referring to problems of the 'age'] was the way in which a personal identity was formulated primarily through its relationship with God," 227.

When another pagan philosopher granted some form of communion, he was only able to conceive of it in abstract notions of providence, nothing ultimately testifying to personal relations between the divine and human.[16] Calvin makes a similar claim regarding the ancient philosophers, with Plato presented as the best of them even though he remained significantly in the dark.[17] According to Owen, these things are "hid in Christ" and thus only discovered fully through him. In humanity's natural state outside of Christ, the idea of God's presence only brings "terror and apprehensions of death."[18] Furthermore, even Old Testament saints who did experience communion with God remained unable to enjoy its fullness: the incarnate Lord adds παρρησίαν ('boldness and confidence'; see Heb. 4:16, 10:19) and ἐλευθερίαν ('freedom and liberty in access to God'; see 2 Cor. 3:17) to the believer's fellowship with God.[19] Christ not only makes the impossible possible, but he does so in a way that leads to mutual relations between God and believers, as we see in Owen's definition of communion.

Defining Communion

Since communion and commune can have various meanings we need to explore Owen's somewhat complex formulation of these ideas. According to Owen, 'communion' relates in general 1) to things and persons (c.f., natures), 2) to a state and condition, or 3) to actions.[20] Communion with God cannot be restricted to any one of these, nor can it simply be said to include all of them without qualification. Persons that share the same nature can relate mutually to one another in a way that a rock and a human cannot; this helps explain the incarnation, wherein the Son assumed the same "common nature with the rest of mankind."[21] Regarding communion through sharing the same condition, this can be either internal or external. The example Owen gives is of Christ with the thieves hanging on the crosses; they all shared the same external condition which had them under a curse, yet one of the

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[16] *Works*, 2: 8. Owen seems to be referring to Cicero, his book *de Nat. Deor.* Bk. 1. For Aristotle reference, see footnote 1.

[17] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.25.2.

[18] *Works*, 2: 8. Cf. a similar theme in Luther, who argued that the God "known by natural reason was an unapproachable God of wrath: his righteous judgements could only evoke man's hatred and rebellion," Christopher B. Kaiser, *The Doctrine of God: An Historical Study* (London: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1982), 96.

[19] *Works*, 2: 6-7.

[20] See *Works*, 2: 7 ff.

[21] *Works*, 2: 7. See Luke 23: 40.

thieves came to share the same internal or spiritual condition with Christ due to his faith.[22] Finally, a sort of communion occurs when two or more join together in action, which may be either good (e.g., worshiping God) or evil (e.g., plotting a murder).

This general discussion yields to his particular concern for the wonder of human communion with God. To begin, this communion between divine and human persons is voluntary rather than something "natural," since their natures remain distinct. It also requires "consent," thus protecting the personal and purposeful foundation of the relationship. Communion with God cannot simply be thought of in terms of "state and conditions," but rather in terms of the action or responsiveness between two parties. Given that there is a difference between the divine and human, interpersonal fellowship seems unlikely. Although taking exception to the skepticism of pagan philosophers regarding the possibility of interpersonal fellowship between the divine and human, the profundity of the relationship does not escape Owen's notice. This is especially striking since he believes true communion relates to the "mutual communication" of good between two persons, allowing each to delight in the other. An unending monologue or isolated autonomy is ruled out in Owen's conception of communion. Jonathan and David's intimate friendship as portrayed in 1 Samuel 20:17 serves as his positive example. Mutuality of love grounds Owen's formulation, testifying to his persistent unwillingness to speak in abstractions devoid of experiential content.

At this point a careful distinction between union and communion with God must be observed. Within the Calvinist Puritan tradition, union with God is unilateral in that it designates divine movement and action which prompts, secures, and preserves a person in the life of faith. Once united to Christ there can be no final falling away; nothing is able to tear apart what God has brought together – clearly the underlying theology for the doctrine of perseverance. However, communion with God can be deeply affected by a believer's sin, unresponsiveness to God, and neglect of God's ordinary means of grace. Struggling believers are never at risk of losing their *union* with Christ, but they surely experience times when intimate *communion*

[22] *Works*, 2: 7.

with God feels blocked.[23] One must remember that during the seventeenth century 'to commune' became associated with spiritual communication, or to use the common language, it describes intercourse with God.[24] Obviously this imagery is not new; it has a long theological history that many Puritans drew from, especially in their use of allegorical readings of Canticles.[25] Only when two people actively participate together can this imagery work. For example, distractions may cause a husband to neglect intimate relations with his spouse just as a Christian may neglect his relationship with God. While such neglect does not nullify the union between the parties, it deeply affects the level of intimacy experienced between them.

Although union and communion are related – one cannot have the latter without the former – they are not synonyms. Even though Puritan writers closely associate the terms union and communion, in most (if not all) instances, union precedes communion. This tendency is not a simple linguistic convention, but rather a theological expression of an underlying truth. When these terms are not carefully distinguished, grave misunderstanding can arise. This may partly explain why William Sherlock – the later dean of St. Paul's and certainly not of Owen's Calvinistic leanings – seemed to misread Owen so severely. Attacking Owen's book *Of Communion* almost twenty years after its publication, Sherlock appears to see a different distinction: union should be understood within a political and ecclesiastical framework, while communion is viewed almost wholly in terms of fellowship between saints.[26] As Sherlock uses them, both of these terms point more directly to horizontal rather than vertical relationships. Behind his attack of Owen is his

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[23] Cf. Calvin's vision of "two communions": the first (i.e., justification) is "total" while the second (i.e., sanctification) "grows." See Dennis E. Tamburello, *Union with Christ: John Calvin and the Mysticism of St. Bernard, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology* (Louisville: WJKP, 1994), 86-87.

[24] See C. T. Onions, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 196. An older use of commune that was common between the 16th and 19th century was "to hold intimate (chiefly mental or spiritual) intercourse" with another. Examples include the 1557 Geneva translation of Luke 24:15: "as they communed together and reasoned," or Milton, who in 1671 wrote in *Paradise Regained*, II. 261: "It was the hour of night, when thus the Son Commun'd in silent walk." By 1876 when J. Norris writes his book *Rudim Theolo.*, he acknowledges a common unwillingness to speak of spiritual 'intercourse' even though it simply means 'communion with God,' although the latter appears to him more reverent. See J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, eds. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 577, 580.

[25] Examples of Puritan reflections on the Song of Songs include: Sibbes, J. Durham, D. Fenner, T. Wilcox, G. Gifford, T. Wilson, H. Ainsworth, J. Collinges, N. Homes, J. Cotton and T. Brightman, etc. See J. D. Williams, "The Puritan Quest," 177- 203. Owen describes the design of Canticles as "a mystical, allegorical description of the graces and excellencies of the person of Christ, to render him desirable to the souls of believers," *Works*, 9: 538.

[26] William Sherlock, *Union and Communion with him* (1678, 3rd ed.), 88-119. First edition without corrections was published in 1674. Both editions are used throughout.

tendency towards rationalism and his reaction against elements of Puritan mysticism. Self-consciously taking a sideswipe at Puritan experimentalists, Sherlock complains: "Prayer and Meditation, and such-like Acts of Devotion, are no where called Communion with God, though a prevailing custom hath in our days almost wholly appropriated that name to them."[27] Sherlock fears that so much experiential language about 'communing with God' and loving the 'person of Christ' will ultimately lead people away from following Jesus' moral example, which helps to explain why he so freely accuses Owen of antinomianism.

By redefining the Puritan distinction between union and communion, Sherlock becomes vulnerable to charges of Pelagianism and Socinianism from his opponents.[28] For example, when Sherlock objects to Owen's emphasis on gaining an "acquaintance with Christ's person," he does so because he believes this somehow lowers the gospel or adds something beyond what the scriptures call for. His response shows a very different approach than Owen's. Whereas Owen's conception of the gospel causes him to stress loving the person of Christ who fulfilled all righteousness – thus emphasizing personal relations – Sherlock conceives of the gospel more in terms of principles to live by.[29] "All that the Gospel tells us," explains Sherlock, "is that Christ loved sinners so as to dye for them, and that *he loves good men*, who believe and obey his Gospel so as to save them, and that *he continue to love them, while they*

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[27] W. Sherlock, *Union and Communion with him*, (1678, 3rd ed.), 118-119.

[28] Opponents of W. Sherlock are numerous. For example, Edward Polhill, *An Answer to the Discourse of Mr. William Sherlock, touching the Knowledge of Christ, and our Union and Communion with Him* (London: 1675), attacks Sherlock's view of justification: "When I read it, [Sherlock's book] I thought my self in a new Theological World; Believers appearing without their Head for want of a Mystical Union, strip'd and naked for lack of imputed Righteousness..." (To the Reader, unnumbered page). Cf. Henry Hickman, *Speculum Sherlockianum: Or, A Looking Glass in which the Admirers of Mr. Sherlock may behold the Man, as to his Accuracy, Judgement, Orthodoxy* (London: 1674), who argues against Sherlock that "a man's union to Christ, doth in order of Nature precede his union to the church," 11. He also thinks Sherlock is mistaken in his belief that union and communion are something easy to understand and not a mystery, 36. See also Robert Ferguson, *The Interest of Reason in Religion* (London: 1675); Thomas Danson, *The Friendly Debate between Satan and Sherlock..."* (London: 1676); Samuel Rollè, *Prodromus, or the Character of Mr. Sherlock's book...* and later *Justification Justified* (London: 1674).

Sherlock is not without his defenders, the most able being Thomas Hotchkis, *Imputation of Christ's righteousness to us* (1675); Hotchkis's main concern seems to arise from his fear of antinomianism, claiming many of Owen's statements are guilty of this charge, 142. See also Hotchkis's later response, *A Postscript* (1678). Sherlock personally responds to the specific attacks by Owen and Ferguson in his, *A Defense and Continuation of the Discourse concerning the Knowledge of Jesus Christ* (London: 1675).

[29] Cf. *Works*, 2: 347, where Owen explicitly rejects W. Sherlock's rationalism, concluding that God does not simply present humans with "objective arguments."

continue to be good; but hates them, when they return to their old vices."[30] There is no perseverance of the saints in Sherlock's theology since union with Christ is grounded on a person's continual penitence and obedience rather than on the objective work of Christ.[31] When Sherlock speaks of God's immutability, he means that God always loves the good: as long as a Christian does the good, God freely loves them. However, since God remains immutable, when believers fail to live lives of obedience they find themselves no longer under God's love, but under his hatred! An example of the logical conclusion of William Sherlock's theology is found in no better example than the later Bishop of London, Thomas Sherlock – William's son. In one of his Discourses preached at Temple Church, Thomas argues that anyone who is a child of God "may cease to be a child of God."[32] Such a statement is the antithesis of Owen's view of adoption, as we will see later in this chapter, but it is theologically possible when mystical union is disavowed and communion with God designates little more than fellowship with other saints.

Working within his anthroposensitive framework, Owen rejects claims like Sherlock's as theologically and pastorally disastrous. Whereas William Sherlock rejects the imputation of Christ's righteousness because it leads to antinomianism, Owen believes that imputation alone allows the believer to stand secure in God's immutable love. Owen agrees that God's nature is consistent: because he is just he must hate sin. Nevertheless, Owen finds hope for the believer, not in the sincerity of their repentance and ability to sustain unblemished obedience, but rather in the satisfaction accomplished in the death of Christ, whereby "the greatest sins can do us no hurt."[33] Given that Christ's atonement was fully satisfying and complete, that God is immutable, and that the believer is united to Christ, no cessation of the love of God for his elect is possible. God's immutability and a believer's union to Christ were conceived in order to bring lasting freedom for open communion with God, rather than fearful obedience performed with the hope of remaining acceptable to God. Countering Sherlock's accusations, Owen contends that he does not deny the role of

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[30] W. Sherlock, *Union and Communion with him* (1st ed.), 210. Emphasis mine. For Sherlock "the fundamental design of the Gospel" is clear, it "is to make men good and vertuous, and like to God," (1st ed.), 432.

[31] W. Sherlock, *Union and Communion with him* (1st ed.), 32.

[32] Thomas Sherlock, *Discourses preached at the Temple Church*, 1st ed., vol. 1, Discourse 8 (1754-58), the quote and reference brought to my attention by Howard Watkin-Jones, *The Holy Spirit from Arminius to Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1929), 312. Emphasis mine.

[33] Owen, *A Vindication of Some Passages in a Discourse Concerning Communion with God, from the Exceptions of William Sherlock* (1674), *Works*, 2: 295.

faith and repentance. While attempting to take holiness seriously, Owen wants to distance himself from Sherlock's moralism which runs the risk of making election and redemption dependent on a believer's holiness, rather than on Christ's.[34]

This becomes relevant for our discussion of union and communion with God, since Owen's distinction allows him to deal both with the theological question of God's commitment to his people and the existential reality of every believer's continual battle with sin. One result of Sherlock's almost exclusive emphasis on the horizontal elements of union and communion is that he finds himself without the resources to maintain a distinction between justification and sanctification.[35] Defenders of Owen also thought Sherlock fell into this trap, and Vincent Alsop's accusation that Sherlock is borrowing from the Roman theologian Robert Bellarmine testifies to this observation.[36] This may help explain why Owen's major treatment of justification, written just three years after Sherlock's book was first published, spends far more time attacking Bellarmine than Sherlock. As we noted in our last chapter discussing justification, Owen seems to believe that this is not a new problem, and until theologians have a sufficient doctrine of union with Christ they will be unable to handle the questions related to sanctification. One strategy that Owen uses to maintain his Reformed theology at this point is to keep union and communion closely linked without making them synonyms. Believers united to Christ are enabled and encouraged to commune with God in a suitable fashion.

Here we will simply add one further historical observation. In 1658 a meeting at the Savoy Palace produced "A Declaration of the Faith and Order," slightly revising the Westminster Confession for those within congregationalism. Owen was one of – if not *the* – leading figures at the conference and possibly the author of the preface. With this in mind, several of the minor additions we find to the Westminster text may have relevance for our study. Two such additions are made to the section on the Trinity, one being the creation of a final sentence which provides the opportunity

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[34] Owen, *Works* 2: 296-97, 322.

[35] Another critic of Owen, William Clagett, *A Discourse concerning the Operations of the Holy Spirit* (London: 1680), likewise fails to distinguish between an initial justification and a progressive sanctification, thus also having little room to distinguish between union and communion. For a brief yet fair comparison between Owen and Clagett on related points see, Watkin-Jones, 280-81, 264-66.

[36] N. N. (*aka* Vincent Alsop), *Anti-Sozzo sive Sherlocismus Enervantus* (London: 1675), 545. Ironically Owen's only mention of Bellarmine in his response to W. Sherlock argues that at the end of his life even Bellarmine came to see that "the safest retreat" for the believer inevitably becomes "the merits and righteousness of Christ," Owen, *Works*, 2: 321.

to link this doctrine with communion: "Which Doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our Communion with God, and comfortable Dependence upon him."[37] Remembering that Owen's book *Of Communion* was published in 1657, it does not seem unreasonable to hear Owen's voice whispering in the background for the need to make this formerly implicit connection explicit. In so doing, the necessary link between the Trinity and Christian experience becomes even more prominent. Another apparently insignificant addition to the Westminster text may also point in Owen's direction. Chapter XIII on sanctification shows a new inclusion of the words "united to Christ" in the first sentence, making it clearer for the reader that only from this starting point can one begin to speak properly of the "the practice of all true holiness."[38] None at the Savoy Palace would have disagreed with this assertion, but Owen's sensitivity to the matter may be behind this minor adjustment. These observations fit in with Owen's handling of such ideas in his *Communion* book.

Fundamental to the gospel, as Owen understands it, is union with Christ, allowing renewed communion with God, which only then is expressed through obedience. To experience the delight of communion between persons, it must be "bottomed upon some union between them," since union is the "foundation" of experiences of communion.[39] This distinction helps prevent many Puritan theologians from formulating a justification by works doctrine, while at the same time allowing them to place a high value upon human responsiveness for those inside the house of faith. Understood within this historical background and theological framework, Owen's definition may now be properly understood. "Our Communion . . . with God consisteth in his communication of himself unto us, with our returnal unto him of that which he requireth and accepteth, flowing from that union which in Jesus Christ we have with him."[40]

God's communication of Himself unto us. . .
Union with Christ establishes our relationship to God
Resulting overflow of union is our returning unto God which is both required and accepted by Him (i.e., communion)

[37] A. G. Matthews, ed. *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658* (London: Independent Press, 1959), II.III [p. 79].

[38] *The Savoy Declaration*, XIII.I [p. 92].

[39] *Works*, 2: 8.

[40] *Works*, 2: 8-9.

Divine action is first, union with Christ is the result, and human response is the desired consequence. Here Owen moves between the priority of God's self-revelation to the necessity of human response, the latter assumed possible based on a Christological observation.

As we have seen throughout our study thus far, Owen is quick to apply a methodology that encompasses both 'from above' (i.e., beginning with God) and 'from below' (beginning with humanity) approaches. He accomplishes this by constantly moving between theology and anthropology, between Christology and praxis. Appreciating this dialectic in Owen's thinking helps explain his reflections on communion with the triune God. Since Owen works from the presupposition that all truth about God necessarily has purchase on the believer's life, he will not allow debate and discussion of the Trinity to remain within the academy. Instead, he uses his vast knowledge of scripture and tradition, together with his pastoral sensitivity, to encourage his readers with a central truth of the Christian faith: the triune God has not only established, but also desires intimate fellowship with his people. Examples of this integrated approach will surface in our later discussion of distinct communion with each person of the Trinity.

Approaching the One Triune God

Having established Owen's view that human communion with God is not only possible, but also mutual and intimate, we may now proceed to his emphasis on the distinction and unity of the divine persons with whom the believer communes. Here we note Owen's attempt to present a Trinitarian conception of communion with God that avoids both tri-theism and modalism.

Possibly the quickest way into Owen's Trinitarian approach comes through a succinct examination of his shorter work, *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (1669). Owen begins by highlighting three observations for those who seek to discuss Trinitarian questions. First, he advises the inquirer to understand that this is no "ordinary controversy in religion," for the conclusions reached are "immediately and directly" relevant to the "the souls of men."[41] His second observation is that the "majesty, and infinite, incomprehensible nature of God" requires reverence from the human questioner. Accordingly, this is not a subject "to

[41] *Works*, 2: 368.

be prostituted" before unbelievers for the sake of debate, but rather it should bring about humble worship before the revelation of God. Thus Owen's third observation: any inquirer who looks into the mystery of the Trinity and its importance for human life must willingly submit to whatever is found in scripture. Clearly Owen thinks the traditional orthodox interpretation of debated texts will persuade all who earnestly seek God in his revelation. Here one sees an example of the standard Reformed hermeneutic of *regula fidei et caritatis*: when governed by this rule ambiguous passages are dealt with in light of the apparently less ambiguous ones, ultimately leading those who love God to the truth of scripture.[42] Just as Owen clearly trusts the testimony found in scripture, he also recognizes the unique tendency within fallen humanity to self-deceit. Therefore, the inquirer's humility and openness to God are as necessary for his understanding of this doctrine as are his hermeneutical skills. According to Owen, these personal characteristics are part of those skills![43]

A summary statement of Owen's conception of the Trinity now deserves our attention. What emerges is a fairly standard orthodox position.

> God is one; - that this one God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that the Father is the Father of the Son; and the Son, the Son of the Father; and the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of the Father and the Son; and that, in respect of this their mutual relation, they are distinct from each other.[44]

There is no denying sociality in Owen's conception of the Trinity: the divine persons are "distinct among themselves, by certain peculiar relative properties."[45] Not only are they distinct regarding "internal acts one towards another," but also "in acts that outwardly respect the creation and the several parts of it."[46] Accordingly Owen goes on to develop the root of the distinction between the persons in the traditional language of begetting, begotten, and proceeding. The three divine persons are distinct in their "mutual relation one to another"; this allows them to act distinctly yet as triune – never acting alone, so to speak. Socially the divine persons "know each other, love each other, delight in each other," and consequently they are distinct and are "represented unto our faith" as such.[47] Owen's stress on distinction allows him to freely use the third person plural pronoun 'they' – as we shall see throughout – when referring to the Father, Son, and Spirit. However, at other times Owen may refer to

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[42] Cf. Heppe, *RD*, 34-5.
[43] Cf. Trueman, "Faith Seeking Understanding," 147-62.
[44] *Works*, 2: 377.
[45] *Works*, 2: 405.
[46] *Works*, 2: 405.

the three by employing the third person singular pronoun, 'he.'[48] This is possible because Owen thinks scripture clearly points to one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the three persons being "divine, distinct, intelligent, voluntary, omnipotent principles of operation and working."[49] In other words, Owen's language moves between the three persons and the one divine nature without hesitation.

Does a strong emphasis on distinction endanger the unity of God? Owen unreservedly affirms the oneness of God when it comes to the "nature, being, substance, or essence" of the Godhead.[50] One may wonder if Owen is vulnerable to the recent charge leveled against Augustine and many following in his tradition. Some contemporary theologians fear that Augustine falls into the trap of presenting a God who is beyond the divine persons and who is either known outside of the economy of salvation or is altogether unknowable.[51] Does Owen's comment that "this natural Godhead of God is his substance or essence" expose him to such an accusation? It would seem not. He escapes this danger by never opposing unity and distinction within the Godhead. The nature or substance of God is the nature or substance of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, "one and the same absolutely in and unto each of them," which is simply another way of designating the unity of God. Distinction of the persons lies in their subsisting in the same divine nature:

> a divine person is nothing but the divine essence, upon the account of an especial property, subsisting in an especial manner... each person having the understanding, the will, and power of God, becomes a distinct principle of operation; and yet all their actings *ad extra* being the actings of God, they are undivided, and are all the works of one, of the self-same God.[52]

With this basic Trinitarian framework in mind, we may now return to Owen's particular book *Of Communion*, to see how he applies his understanding in more detail.

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[47] *Works*, 2: 406.

[48] E.g., *Works*, 2: 406: "... concerning God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; so as that we may duly believe in *him*, yield obedience unto *him*, enjoy communion with *him*, walk in *his* love and fear, and so come at length to be blessed with *him* for evermore." Emphasis mine.

[49] *Works*, 2: 406.

[50] *Works*, 2: 407.

[51] Gunton, *Trinitarian Theology*, 42, see also 31-57. For a recent defense of Augustine against such charges see, Lewis Ayres, "'Remember That You Are Catholic' (serm. 52.2): Augustine on the Unity of the Triune God," *JECS* 8, no. 1 (2000): 39-82.

[52] *Works*, 2: 407.

Building from a version of 1 John 5:7 which was still common in seventeenth century scholarship,[53] Owen begins to make a case for distinct human communion with each person of the Trinity. This verse speaks of the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, all bearing testimony in heaven to Christ's Sonship and believers' salvation. Noteworthy here is the idea that there are "three distinct witnesses." Believers are to receive God's testimony with the recognition of distinction. "We are to receive their [referring to Father, Son, and Spirit] several testimonies: and in doing so we have communion with them severally; for in this giving and receiving of testimony consists no small part of our fellowship with God."[54] Scripture (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:4-6; Eph. 4:6) speaks of various gifts, administrations, and operations, each coming distinctly from Father, Son, or Spirit, but always from the same God: "so graces and gifts are bestowed, and so are they received."[55] Owen's point is simply that the one true God is the giver of all gifts, yet he gives them distinctly as Father, Son, and Spirit. Consequently, when believers approach God they do so mindful of such distinction, knowing that communion with God comes διὰ Χριστοῦς, ἐν πνεύματι, and πρὸς τὸν πατέρα (cf. Eph. 2:18) – "the persons being here considered as engaged distinctly unto the accomplishment of the counsel of the will of God revealed in the gospel."[56]

The economic Trinity deeply informs how believers are to commune with God, since this is how God has made himself known in special revelation. At times, only the Father and Son are mentioned in scripture (e.g., 1 John 1:3; cf. John 14:23),

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[53] KJV, which Owen here follows, translates 1 John 5:7: "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost," *Works*, 2: 10. This textual gloss is now considered a late addition (probably 14th century), but in Owen's time the verse was still commonly accepted. E.g., in England Thomas Watson, 108, freely used it and later still Edward Stillingfleet, *A Discourse in Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (1697), 120; on the Continent, Turretin, *Elenctic Theology*, 1: 268-69, not only uses the full text, but displays his knowledge of the controversy by arguing that it can be found in ancient manuscripts, such as in Jerome (*Prologus Septem Epistolarum Canonicarum* [*PL* 29.870-74]). Turretin blames the Arians for the occasions when the full text is missing in many of the ancient manuscripts. For a recent summary of the textual problems see, Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 716-18.

[54] *Works*, 2: 10. Emphasis mine.

[55] *Works*, 2: 10. Cf. Owen's exegesis of 1 Cor. 12: 3-6 in his work on the *Trinity Vindicated*, *Works*, 2: 402.

[56] *Works*, 2:10. Given that Owen freely moves from 1 John 5:7 to this classic formulation, a recent comment on the textual gloss of 1 John 5: 7 is challenging. The "gloss is not a very happy one, as the threefold testimony of verse 8 is to Christ; and the biblical teaching about testimony is not that Father, Son and Holy Spirit bear witness together to the Son, but that the Father bears witness to the Son through the Spirit," John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 183.

joined by "the particle 'and,'" which "is both distinguishing and uniting."[57] Other times fellowship with God is mentioned with distinct reference to one person in particular, such as the Son or the Spirit (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:9). So, for example, while all three divine persons are mentioned in 2 Cor. 13:14, it nevertheless distinctly connects κοινωνία with the Holy Spirit. With the reception from and returning worship to each divine person, the believer does not interact with abstractions, but approaches the persons who are the united Being, remembering their inseparability. Believers worship God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

From this realization Owen concludes that all human encounters with God are encounters with the divine persons; believers do not worship an undifferentiated Godhead. Every act of worship and obedience is necessarily and "distinctly directed unto Father, Son and Spirit."[58] Only in this way do believers have communion with God, which means it is necessarily and "distinctly" experienced with each person of the Trinity. Again, this is grounded in the revelation of God, whereby he reveals himself as triune. Yet, how can worship take place which preserves both God's unity and diversity?

We are now in a position to explore Owen's twofold defense of his thesis about the distinct communication of the Deity to the believer. First, he argues that "when the same thing is, at the same time, ascribed jointly and yet distinctly to all the persons in the Deity, and respectively to each of them," one cannot collapse the distinctions for the sake of unity.[59] While interpreting Revelation 1:4-5 as referring distinctly to each person (i.e., Father, Son, and Spirit) as giving grace and peace unto the believer, these verses also testify to the fact that God alone gives such blessings. Owen believes it is significant that Revelation nevertheless mentions each, instead of simply saying God, for it emphasizes that each distinctly gives these gifts to the believer.

Second, Owen believes that scripture attributes the same thing "severally and singly unto each person" of the Trinity.[60] Here again the Puritan highlights both distinction and union between the Father, Son, and Spirit. In so doing he remains faithful to the Augustinian dictum 'opera ad extra sunt indivisa' while emphasizing

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[57] *Works*, 2:11.
[58] *Works*, 2: 15.
[59] *Works*, 2: 15.
[60] *Works*, 2: 15.

distinction.[61] The divine persons are not divided, but they are certainly distinct; the alternative is a subtle shift away from three persons, identities, energies, etc. into a modalistic tendency, denying any real distinction between the three. Scripture seems to hold onto a clear distinction and the teaching of God serves as Owen's example. From the Father comes all spiritual teaching: "him we hear, of him we learn, by him are we brought unto union and communion with Jesus Christ." [62] God the Father is the one who draws people to himself through his Spirit. Functioning as prophet and king, the Son's revelation is that of a "life-giving, a spirit-breathing teaching."[63] Here Owen moves from the close connection between the Father and Son, to the vital link between the Son and Spirit. These cannot be separated even though Owen acknowledges that scripture describes each as distinct in their teaching the people of God. Finally, the Spirit is described as the comforter who makes all things known to believers. In sum, God is the great teacher, yet he only teaches distinctly as Father, Son, and Spirit. Since God communicates grace distinctly "from the several persons of the Deity" the obvious implication for Owen is that "the saints must needs have distinct communion with them."[64] Such a pattern of God's communication, Owen believes, would follow in various other examples besides teaching, including both the quickening and persevering of saints.

We may now ask again, how does one properly worship a triune God? Is it inappropriate to worship each person of the Trinity distinctly, or is this even possible? Does this type of discussion necessarily drive a wedge between the divine persons, ultimately separating them? Owen's exploration into these mysteries brings him to the following conclusion: "The divine nature is the reason and cause of all worship; so that it is impossible to worship any one person, and not worship the whole Trinity."[65] He goes on to explain further:

> Our access in our worship is said to be 'to the Father;' and this 'through Christ,' or his mediation; 'by the Spirit,' or his assistance. *Here is a distinction of the persons, as to their operations, but not at all as to their*

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[61] See *Works*, 2: 15, 18, 227, 269, 407. Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology:* 1: 326: "We need not surrender the basic truth that the Father, Son, and Spirit work together in creation, reconciliation, and redemption because we accept the possibility of distinguishing the persons in these works."

[62] *Works*, 2: 16.

[63] *Works*, 2: 16.

[64] *Works*, 2: 16. Cf. Ames, 93: "The distinct manner of working consists in each [divine] person working according to the particular form [*ratio*] of his subsistence."

[65] *Works*, 2: 268. Cf. *Works*, 12: 380.

> *being the object of our worship.* For the Son and the Holy Ghost are no less worshipped in our access to God than the Father himself; only, the grace of the Father, which we obtain by the mediation of the Son and the assistance of the Spirit, is that which we draw nigh to God for. So that *when, by the distinct dispensation of the Trinity, and every person, we are led to worship . . . any person, we do herein worship the whole Trinity*; and *every person,* by what name soever, of Father, Son, or Holy Ghost, *we invocate him.*[66]

Owen's conception of prayer is deeply informed by the above presupposition. Since he believes that in worshiping any one divine person the Christian is worshiping the whole Trinity, he does not hesitate to endorse the view that prayers may be made to each divine person, including the Holy Spirit.[67]

Along similar lines Owen's Continental contemporary Francis Turretin likewise argues that the distinction of the three does not take away from the One, rather it ensures a full understanding of worship. Turretin believes that the worshipper is not dividing his worship between different Gods, but instead worshiping the One true God. The Christian "ought to be convinced that, on the ground of the unity and consubstantiality (*homoousia*) of the persons, the Son and the Holy Sprit are invoked by the same act of invocation which is addressed to the Father." At this point Turretin reminds the worshiper of Gregory Nazianzus' statement: "I cannot think of one without being instantly surrounded with the splendor of three; nor can I discern the three without being suddenly attracted to one."[68] Owen also cites this particular comment of Gregory's, though he does so in an untranslated footnote, not citing the particular work from which it comes.[69] Such historical observations remind the reader that – contrary to popular belief – twentieth century

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[66] *Works,* 2: 269. Emphases mine. In his work on ΧΡΙΣΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ, Owen makes a similar observation: "1. That the divine nature, which is individually the same in each person of the holy Trinity, is the proper formal object of all divine worship, in adoration and invocation; wherefore, no one person is or can be worshipped, but in the same individual act of worship each person is equally worshipped and adored. 2. That it is lawful to direct divine honour, worship, and invocation unto any person, in the use of his peculiar name – the Father, Son, or Spirit – or unto them altogether; but to make any request unto one person, and immediately the same unto another, is not exemplified in the Scripture, nor among the ancient writers of the church," *Works*, 1: 20-21. Owen sees this rule in many of the Fathers, including Augustine in *Enchrid.* xxxviii: "Quando unus trium in aliquo opere nominatur, universa operari trinitas intelliguitur." ET: "When one person of the three is named in any work, the whole Trinity is to be understood to effect it."

[67] E.g., *Works*, 2: 229-30: "Now the Holy Ghost, being God, is no less to be invocated, prayed to, and called on, than the Father and Son." Owen is not alone in this assertion among his Puritan contemporaries who built upon a tradition within the Reformation. See also *Works* 2: 271-2. Cf. Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes 1555*, trans. Clyde L. Manschreck (New York: OUP, 1965), 37-8.

[68] Turrettin, *Elenctic Theology*, 1: 272. Quote from *On Holy Baptism* 41 [*NPNF2*, vol. 7: 375].

[69] *Works*, 2: 10: "Οὐ φθάνω τὸ ἕν νοῆσαι, καὶ τοῖς τρισὶ περιλάμπομαι, οὐ φθάνω τὰ τρία διελεῖν, καὶ εἰς τὸ ἕν ἀναφέρομαι."

theologians did not discover the insights of Gregory: the Protestant scholastics had long used them as a means to promote distinct worship of the triune God.[70]

Underlying Owen's thought, and Turretin's for that matter, is the classic Western conception of the economic Trinity. Owen conceives of the grace of God as communicated distinctly from the Father through Christ in the power of the Spirit. The Father is viewed in terms of "original authority," the Son as the one who communicates this grace "from a purchased treasury," and the Spirit communicates "by immediate efficacy."[71] Given this presupposed framework, it is a mistake to accuse Owen of general heretical ideas. For example, he would not endorse any form of modalistic monarchianism. These are distinct persons, not mental abstractions of the believer, nor simply different masks worn by the hidden God; neither the Father nor the Spirit becomes incarnate and suffers on the cross. Owen does not fall into the trap of tri-theism either. While Sherlock and others would later attack elements of Owen's thought in this particular work, it is significant that tri-theism is never a charge leveled against him.[72] Though these three, Father, Son, and Spirit are distinct, they nevertheless remain as triune "in that one divine essence" most clearly declared in the Shema.[73] Here plurality is found within a monotheistic conception of the Godhead.

Of primary concern for Owen is the believer's ability to commune fully with God, and if scripture – as he understands it – speaks in terms of both distinction and unity, then he believes the minister is bound to do the same.

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[70] Such appreciation does not disappear even within later Reformed writers, e.g., George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, 2nd ed., The Ninth Series of the Cunningham Lectures (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889), 6, who likewise quotes Gregory on this point.

[71] See *Works*, 2: 16-17.

[72] During the Trinitarian controversies at the end of the seventeenth century, W. Sherlock is the one who faces the charge of tritheism: Robert South strongly reacts against Sherlock's conception of three Minds with self-consciousness which are understood as the Trinity in Unity. W. Sherlock's, *A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation* (London: 1690) and *A Defence of Dr. Sherlock's Notion of a Trinity in Unity* (London: 1694), are attacked by South in his *Animadversions upon Dr. Sherlock's Book, entitled a Vindication of the Holy and Ever-Blessed Trinity* (1693) and *Tritheism charged upon Dr. Sherlock's New Notion of the Trinity, and the charge made good* (1694).

[73] *Works*, 2: 381. See Deut. 6:4.

Communion with the Father

The Father and Human Psychological Hesitations

Some have observed that the Puritan emphasis on sinful humanity, inherited largely from the line of Augustine and Calvin, lends itself to deep personal despair. While this tradition allows God to receive all praise and glory for human salvation, it can also produce the by-product of feelings of "unworthiness" and "a constant preoccupation with the need to assuage God's wrath."[74] It is argued that those prone to obsessive analysis of their own unworthiness – a common phenomenon among many English Puritans – often ended in "deep depressions and extremes of self-loathing."[75] Such observations, however, did not first appear in the writings of twentieth century social historians: many Puritan pastors understood this problem in one form or another. Yet they usually viewed this phenomenon not as the result of an improper view of humanity, but arising from *an improper view of God.* Despair and anxiety arise in believers when they fail to perceive the true character of their heavenly Father.

Precisely along these lines Owen shows his concern for the improper psychological tendencies which believers' often have in their view of God the Father. His involvement in pastoral care – including his time as a congregational minister in Coggeshall, as an army chaplain, and even as a spiritual mentor to Oxford students – informs his understanding of how many saints envisioned their heavenly Father. Apparently these misconceptions were not simply learned from others, but had been a part of his own life as well. It is helpful to remember that as a younger man Owen struggled with feeling God's acceptance and assurance of salvation even after being a chaplain and preaching for some time.[76] Thus Owen's treatise reflects a keen awareness of this widespread human experience.

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[74] Christopher Durston and Jacquline Eales, eds. *The Culture of English Puritanism 1560-1700* (London: MacMillian Press, 1996), 10, esp. 9-13. But see J. D. Williams, "The Puritan Quest," who complains: "historians, far more obsessed with sin and salvation than the original Puritans, have generally concentrated on preparation, conversion and assurance rather than union and communion with God, resulting in an impoverished view of Puritan devotion," 90.

[75] Durston, 11. Cf. Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1625* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 114.

[76] See Beeke, (1991), 239-40. Cf. *Works*, 6: 324.

A common human tendency is to view God as only distant, wrathful and angry about sin.[77] This tendency constructs a God who is "always angry" and so "implacable" that no creature would dare to draw near to him.[78] While it is understandable for those outside of the faith to fear God in this way, it is inappropriate to incorporate such emotions into the believer's conception of the Father. "It is misapprehension of God that makes any run from him, who have the least breathing wrought in them after him."[79] This "misapprehension" comes as a result of meditating solely on the Father's known characteristics of "terrible majesty, severity, and greatness," all of which will overwhelm the soul seeking any personal communion with the Father.[80] These images largely come from a person's "natural expectations" of what God will be like, yet a believer's communion with God produces a different experience, one of loving "intercourse with him."[81]

If the Father ought not to be viewed by the believer as simply wrathful and angry, why is this a common experience among Christians? Owen argues that much of the problem stems from believers' uncertainty about the Father's attitude toward them. An example of this may be seen in the disciples' response as they are learning of Jesus' coming departure (see John 16:26-28). Although they are secure in Jesus' compassionate commitment to them, with his coming ascension the disciples' thoughts turn toward the Father, and in this situation Jesus perceives uneasiness. Owen deduces that this reality is why when Jesus prays to the Father for his disciples, he adds the clarification, "for the Father himself loveth you."[82] Jesus is assuring his disciples that the Father does not need to be persuaded to love them, for indeed love is the Father's "peculiar respect towards you."[83] While Jesus does pray and the Spirit brings comfort, these are not the causes but the fruit of the Father's love. Since the idea of "love itself, free love, eternal love," comes from the Father who is this fountain of love himself, "there is no need of any intercession for that."[84] However, Owen claims that until this truth is fully grasped, disciples in all ages will hesitate to hold communion with the Father.

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[77] *Works*, 2: 19.
[78] *Works*, 2: 34.
[79] *Works*, 2: 32.
[80] *Works*, 2: 32.
[81] *Works*, 2: 24.
[82] *Works*, 2: 20. See John 26:26,27. Owen later restates this observation when discussing Christ's oblation, *Works*, 2: 198.
[83] *Works*, 2: 20.
[84] *Works*, 2: 20.

Not only is the tendency to think negatively of the Father common to natural man, it is also stirred up by satanic powers. Satan uses "hard thoughts of God" to prevent and disrupt human communion with the Father, beginning in the garden by arguing that God threatens death to Adam and Eve for no good reason.[85] This kind of distortion, according to Owen, is still used effectively by the evil one against God's people. Only when believers are reminded of the true love of God and his compassionate disposition towards them will they be psychologically free to commune with the Father. These "hard thoughts" are grievous to God since he knows "full well what fruit this bitter root is like to bear, – what alienations of heart, – what drawings back, – what unbelief and tergiversations in our walking with him."[86] Just as a child avoids an encounter with his angry father, so a believer will avoid the heavenly Father if his presence represents wrath and fear.

At this point Owen also makes an observation which he presumes is rather common among believers. He notices that while believers can imagine God as angry and willing to punish those who die in their sins, they fail to conceive of God's peculiar love for them, or as Owen writes, they "are afraid to have good thoughts of God."[87] Such thoughts of God's goodness, tenderness, and love seem difficult for saints to hold onto. This reaction is a result of "soul-deceit from Satan," who brings such fearful thoughts. In contradistinction, Owen argues that the Father is the fountain of love, and must be viewed as such for communion to take place between himself and the believer. Therefore, we must now turn to Owen's conception of the Father.

The Reality of the Love of the Father

Turning to the Father's attitude toward the saints, it seems appropriate to remember that in the twentieth century Owen himself has been heavily attacked for presenting an angry and wrathful God void of compassion. R. G. Lloyd argues that the most significant problem in Owen's theology appears in his construction of a God who is simply "the embodiment of the Moral Law." Consequently, Owen's theology presents a Deity that "was bound by His own Nature to punish sin and to uphold righteousness, but that [God] possessed no inherent quality that compelled Him to be

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[85] *Works*, 2: 35.
[86] *Works*, 2: 35.
[87] *Works*, 2: 35.

merciful."[88] A similar view espoused by James B. Torrance interprets Owen's doctrine of God and the atonement as driven primarily by Aristotelian logic and presuppositions (e.g., the divine as actus purus). Torrance argues that this inevitably led Owen to conclude "that justice is the essential attribute of God," whereas God's love is dismissed as arbitrary or accidental.[89] Do such statements have merit?

As a Puritan preacher in the Reformed tradition of his day, Owen did not hesitate to speak about the holiness and justice of God, by which God in his purity could not simply dismiss sin as insignificant. However, to conclude that justice is more important or fundamental to God than love is to completely misunderstand Owen – and the Reformed scholasticism of the day. Although Owen believes in particular atonement, this does not place justice before love, since both love and justice are inseparable to God's being. Neither love nor justice is accidental. According to Protestant scholastics, "The attributes are distinguished neither from the essence nor from each other but only by our conceiving."[90] Such division of attributes is a result of human limitation rather than a hierarchy within God's being. If love were not essential to God then humanity would have been lost in their sins, never able to re-establish any right relationship with their Creator. Instead of this being the case, Owen portrays a God who, while perfectly holy and just, is a God of love, and this love is found particularly in his discussions of God the Father.

Throughout Owen's discussion of the Father, he often employs the specific imagery of a fountain.[91] This is not unusual, but has patristic roots and was employed freely among Protestant scholastics.[92] According to Owen, the "great discovery of the gospel" is realized in finding out that "the Father, as the fountain of the Deity" is to be known not as wrathful, but as the One who has revealed himself "peculiarly as love."[93] As the fountain the Father serves as the "spring of all gracious

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[88] R. G. Lloyd, "Life and Work of John Owen," 333.

[89] James B. Torrance, "The Incarnation and 'Limited Atonement'," 33, 37. The same charge is leveled against Jonathan Edwards, 37.

[90] J. Henricus Hottingerus, *Cursus theologicus Methodo Altingiana* (Heidelberg, 1660), cited by Heppe, *RD*, 59, see also 57-104.

[91] E.g., *Works*, 2: 19, 21-23, 28, 35-36, 38.

[92] See Muller, *DLGTT*, 44, who notes that when applied to God the Father, it communicates the idea that "the First Person of the Trinity is the *fons totius divinitatis*, the source or ground of the whole Godhead," 44, 123.

[93] *Works*, 2: 19.

communications and fruits of love" which are revealed in Christ.[94] The analogy of the fountain unites the activities of the Father and the Son: "though all our refreshment actually lie in the streams, yet by them we are led up unto the fountain." The Father is the fountain of love, and though the worshiper sips from the stream (i.e., Jesus Christ), he is continually directed back to the source of "eternal love itself."[95]

This remarkable love coming from the divine fountain provides the center for Owen's understanding of the Father. Love emerging from the Father is not limited, liable to increase or decrease, or based on whim, but rather it is "eternal," "unchangeable," "immutable," and "infinitely gracious."[96] Owen provides the image of an "infinite ocean of love" without beginning or end; such love does not "grow to eternity" but is "constant" and will not diminish.[97] Believers' actions cannot merit the Father's love, for it is a "compassionate" and "free love," and as such it is an "undeserved" love of "kindness."[98] Instead of only being a God of justice, as if justice were an attribute exclusive of love, Owen unquestionably declares that "God is love," for he has a "loving nature."[99] Encouraging the imagination of his readers, Owen asks them to picture anything that appears to have "a loving and tender nature in the world," and after imagining away any imperfections or weaknesses, the love of the Father becomes easier to conceive: "He is as a father, a mother, a shepherd, a hen over chickens."[100] While all earthly manifestations of love serve as pointers to the source of love itself, they should not be confused with the perfect love of the Father.

Divine love may be thought of in a twofold manner, as both *beneplaciti* and *amicitiae*. The former refers to a love of "good pleasure and destination," while the latter communicates a love "of friendship and approbation."[101] The *beneplacitum Dei* was common language used by Reformed Protestant scholastics to convey the idea of God's voluntary, free, and sovereign plan.[102] Acknowledging this element of God's

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[94] *Works*, 2: 23.

[95] *Works*, 2: 23. Owen also uses his familiar analogy of the sun and its beams to make the same point.

[96] *Works*, 2: 19-20, 23, 29, 30, 36.

[97] *Works*, 2: 27, 30.

[98] *Works*, 2: 19-20. 23, 32, 34, 36.

[99] *Works*, 2: 19. Cf. 1 John 4: 8, Exodus, 34: 6-7.

[100] *Works*, 2: 22. He cites Ps. 103:13; Isa. 63:16; Matt. 6:6; Ps. 23:1; Isa. 40:11; Matt. 23: 37. Noticeably Isa. 66: 13, which reads, "'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you,' saith the Lord" is used twice by Owen (cf. 38), revealing a willingness to extend motherly traits toward the Father. For a similar use in Calvin see William J. Bouwsma, "The Spirituality of John Calvin," in *Christian Spirituality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 323-4.

[101] *Works*, 2: 21.

[102] See Muller, *DLGTT*, 57.

love, Owen seeks to ground the incarnation, and by implication the reconciliation of the world to God, in the Father's eternal love. On the other hand, Owen speaks of divine love as that of friendship (*amicitiae*), significantly referencing Martin Bucer rather than Aristotle.[103] This is because Owen's assumptions run contrary to Aristotle's regarding the friendship between parties who are truly unequal, especially in terms of "acts of justice." [104] Aristotle argues that when a great difference develops between parties (e.g., virtue, vice, wealth), "they are no longer friends, and do not even expect to be so. And this is most manifest in the case of the gods; for they surpass us most decisively in all good things." [105] The gods are far too distant from humanity to be considered friends for Aristotle. Opposed to this, Owen sees the Father's own free love overcoming the distance and reestablishing friendship by sending his Son. Whereas Aristotle may speak of friendship normally restricted to equals, Owen's Trinitarian theology drives him to a completely different conception of friendship – personal friendship with the triune God. Paraphrasing John 14:23, in which to love Christ is taken as loving the Father, Owen further interprets Jesus' language of "we" as fully Trinitarian, meaning that "even the Father and Son. . . by the Spirit" will come to dwell in believers. No divine person is excluded from the renewed relationship. Yet again, this promise and reality stems from the "peculiar prerogative" of the Father's love, though it is the undivided love of God.[106] Whereas Aristotle claims the "better should be more loved than he loves," Owen claims God's love for humanity far exceeds humanity's love for God.[107]

The Father's love is bounteous, and while there may be some similarities between a believer's love for God and God's love for them, there are also significant dissimilarities. We may begin by looking at the parallels.

First, there is a similarity between God's love and the believer's in that for both it is a "love of rest and complacency."[108] Although he cites both Augustine and

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[103] He quotes Bucer: "Diligi a patre, recipi in amicitiam summi Dei; a Deo foveri, adeoque Deo esse in deliciis." *Works*, 2: 21. ET: "To be loved by the Father, to be welcomed into the friendship of the most high God; to know God's favor, this is what it is to be in the delights of God." Friendship with God is a common theme among Puritans. Cf. Paul Blackham, "The Pneumatology of Thomas Goodwin" (Ph.D., King's College London, 1995), 210.

[104] Aristotle, *EN*, 8.7.

[105] For Aristotle's full discussion on friendship, see *EN*, Bk 8.

[106] *Works*, 2: 21.

[107] Aristotle, *EN*, 8.7.

[108] *Works*, 2: 25.

Aquinas,[109] Owen turns primarily to scripture which displays the rest of God in terms of God's remarkable silence regarding believers' faults: he will not "complain of any thing in them whom he loves, but he is silent on the account thereof. . . he will not seek farther for another object" for his love, but is satisfied. Regarding God's delight or complacency, Owen cites scriptural statements which portray both inward affections of God and outward demonstrations of that delight. God exceedingly delights in his church, rejoicing (i.e., tripudiare) in the same way "as men overcome with some joyful surprisal."[110] So overflowing is the Father's love that "He sings to his church."[111] Believers also discover God to be their rest and delight. While the soul has looked for a place to rest from its wanderings, nothing it has loved satisfies its longing until it embraces God, who alone fills the soul with "present and eternal rest."[112] We will pick this theme up in chapter six in our discussion of the Lord's day. Owen describes communion with God as sweeter than life itself, and thus the believer finds ultimate delight in this relationship.

Second, Christ is the only means by which to communicate this love. "The Father communicates no issue of his love unto us but through Christ; and we make no return of love unto him but through Christ."[113] Although the Father's love is grounded in his grace and will, it is accomplished in and through his Son. Using the vivid image of an "infinite ocean of love" that is the Father, Owen claims that believers "are not to look for one drop from him but what comes through Christ."[114] Since the Son uniquely provides the way to understand the love of the Father – for the Father to work apart from his Son is unthinkable – the believer's approach to the Father is also only viewed in terms of Christ. Jesus is the sacrificial offering as well as the means through which prayers become pleasing incense to God. As Owen portrays it: "Our love is fixed on the Father; but it is conveyed to him through the Son of his love. He is the only way for our graces as well as our persons to go unto God;

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[109] Aquinas, *ST* 1a2ae.25.2. "Effectus amoris quando habetur amatum, est delecatatio." ET: "But the effect of love, when the beloved object is possessed, is pleasure." Augustine (without reference): "Amore est complacentia amantis in amato. Amor est motus cordis, delectantis se in aliquo." ET: "The delight in love is that of the lover in his beloved. Love is the beat of the heart that delights itself in something."

[110] *Works* 2: 25.

[111] *Works*, 2: 25-26. He gets this idea from Zeph. 3:17; Isa. 27: 2,3; Ps. 147:11, 149:4.

[112] *Works*, 2: 26.

[113] *Works*, 2: 27. Cf. Alsop, *Anti-Sozzo*, 718. For both Owen and Alsop, the Covenant is the key.

[114] *Works*, 2: 27. He also gives the image of the Father as the "honey in the flower; –it must be in the comb before it be for our use. Christ must extract and prepare this honey for us."

through him passeth all our desire, our delight, our complacency, our obedience."[115] We will explore these ideas more fully in the section on communion with the Son.

Given these similarities between the love of the Father and humanity's love, we can now turn to the apparent dissimilarities. The dissimilarities may be summarized: 1) God's love is bounteous, humanity's is a duty, 2) the Father's love is antecedent, humanity's is consequent, 3) the love of God is immutable, humanity's is mutable. Each of these differences highlights the supremacy of the Father's love. Like a fountain overflowing with water, or the clouds so full that they must pour forth rain, so the Father's love is "out of its own fullness."[116] His love is prior, whereas the believer's love is one of response and gratitude. His love is not caused by anything outside of himself because, before there is anything "lovely" in people, God sets his affections on them. As a result, believers are captured by God's "excellency, loveliness, and desirableness" which causes their response of love to the Father. Furthermore, each party's love reflects their character. Since the Father is immutable, so is his love. Since humanity is mutable, so their love tends to waver. Using a favorite illustrative image, Owen claims the Father's love is like the sun which is always full and does not change, whereas the changing "enlargements and straitenings" of the moon better reflects the unsteady love of believers. Here again Owen highlights the comforting fact that believers' behavior will not "heighten" nor "lessen" the Father's unchanging love. This does not mean that God never chastens his children, but rather that he only does so from a position of unflinching love and commitment to them.[117]

One final observation of particular importance for our overall study needs to be made concerning the character of the Father's peculiar love. As a whole we have noted Owen's anthroposensitive method which seeks to understand theological conclusions in light of anthropological observations. Such a concern extends to his views about God's very nature. Whereas fallen humans are called θεοστυγεῖς (haters of God), the word Owen chooses to describe the nature of God is φιλάνθρωπος (lover of humanity).[118] Although this term has only minor biblical attestation (esp. Titus 3:4, cf. Acts 27:3; 28:2), it has a rich theological history. For example, it was one of Athanasius' choice words used to describe God's active love, most clearly seen

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[115] *Works*, 2: 27-28.
[116] *Works*, 2: 28.
[117] *Works*, 2: 30.

in the incarnation.[119] Behind this idea one finds Owen's reading of 1 John 4:10, by which God loved his people before they loved him. This allows him to make a distinction: God loves "his people, –not their sinning"; if this were not the case then salvation could never be secure.[120] Again, taken within a Trinitarian conception, Owen emphasizes the eternal and free love by which the Father delights in his people together with the Son who rejoices in the opportunity to fulfill the Father's desire. Here the Son is like a mirror of the Father, so that the Father looks to the Son and sees not only "the express image of his person and the brightness of his glory," but also his "love and delight in the sons of men."[121] The Father and the Son are φιλάνθρωπος, and to divorce this truth from the character of God is to misunderstand the God who seeks true communion with his children. Later in his treatise Owen briefly explores the rich language used in Titus 3:4-7 to describe God's love.[122] The vocabulary in this section is easily viewed in chart form.

Χρηστότης	God's goodness and desire to profit us
Φιλανθρωπία	His love, propensity to help, assist, and relieve those towards whom he is so affected
Ἔλεος	Mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and tenderness to those suffering
Χάρις	Free pardoning bounty, undeserved love

All of these attributes are ascribed to the Savior God (τοῦ Θεοῦ σωτήρος). Here Owen follows the biblical text which he thinks operates in an overtly Trinitarian manner: God's redemptive activities arise out of the love and kindness of the Father, procured by the Son, and communicated by the Holy Spirit who is as water poured out abundantly on believers. The nature of God is one of love, mercy, compassion, and goodness; these are characteristics clearly seen in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Believers' Response to the Father

Given Owen's pastoral observations regarding common misconceptions of the Father by believers, what response should a corrected view of the Father's love elicit

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[118] *Works*, 2: 29.
[119] See T. F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith*, 74, 147-48.
[120] *Works*, 2: 31.
[121] *Works*, 2: 33.

from them? According to Owen, only by "eyeing" the Father's love will the believer be able to rest from his fears in the midst of the storms of life.[123] Problematically most Christians cannot "carry up their hearts and minds to this height by faith," failing to see the Father's true love, and thus failing to find rest for their tired souls. By neglecting the Spirit's prompting to approach the Father through the Son, Christians who should be free feel heavy, and those who should rejoice find themselves anxious about the Father's disposition toward them.[124] Only when believers meditate on the kind of love displayed by the Father will they be prompted to commune with him.[125]

Readers are reminded that the triune God is self-sufficient, "infinitely satiated with himself and his own glorious excellencies and perfections." The Father has begotten the Son from all eternity and fully delighted in him, and yet, for some reason, the Father has shown that he freely and immutably "loves his saints also."[126] Such an observation aims to bring believers assurance that they can have confidence in the Father's love for them. Indeed, the most unkind reaction Owen imagines believers responding with is a failure to trust that the Father does desire communion with his people.

Nevertheless, this must be a mutual communion, as noted above, and so it requires not simply one party, but two. Although the Father is the ground and source of all love and the believer's obedience thus "begins in the love of God," it "ends in our love to him."[127] Four characteristics summarize a believer's communion with the Father: rest, delight, reverence, and obedience.[128] Believers who have received the love of the Father are encouraged to make "returns," showing their love and delight in the Father.[129] In typical Owen fashion, this response to God should be a holistic one, including the mind, will, and affections. Having an eye on the Father the believer in faith must openly accept these revelations of the Father as true. "When the Lord is, by his word, presented as [loving] unto thee, let thy mind know it, and assent that it is so; and thy will embrace it, in its being so; and all thy affections be filled with it." He

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[122] *Works*, 2: 190.
[123] *Works*, 2: 23.
[124] *Works*, 2: 32.
[125] *Works*, 2: 33-34, 19.
[126] *Works*, 2: 32-33.
[127] *Works*, 2: 24.
[128] *Works*, 2: 28-29.
[129] *Works*, 2: 19.

concludes, "Set thy whole heart to it; let it be bound with the cords of this love."[130] Every human faculty is involved in responding to God.[131] Any dialogue lacking the full attention of one participant fails to actualize Owen's conception of intimate communion.

Finally, Owen expects his opponents to ask: does such an emphasis on God's love negate human responsibility? Antinomianism is not an issue because anyone who has truly tasted of the love of God would not support such a perversion of the gospel: "the doctrine of grace may be turned into wantonness; the principle cannot."[132] Rather, God's love endears the soul not only to delight in the Father, but also to abide in him. Here we see a direct correlation between Christians' view of God and their willingness to commune with him: "So much as we see of the love of God, so much shall we delight in him, and no more."[133] Therefore, Owen encourages his readers to return to the source of love and acceptance; in doing so he believes they will be transformed.

> Sit down a little at the fountain, and you will quickly have a farther discovery of the sweetness of the streams. You who have run from him, will not be able, after a while, to keep at a distance for a moment.[134]

Communion with the Son

While the Father is the fountain from which the believer drinks, he does so only through the Son, for though the Father and the Son cannot be separated, they can be distinguished. Since communion with God implies communion with Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Owen moves on to describe peculiar communion with the Son. Significantly, this section of his treatise is more than twice as long as the sections on the Father and Spirit combined – clearly even his Trinitarian approach has a Christocentric framework. In order to appreciate this emphasis we will focus on three particular themes around which Owen structures this part of his work. First, we look

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[130] *Works*, 2: 34. The imagery here must be understood in light of Old Testament binding of sacrifices with cords taken to the altar. See Susan Hardman Moore, "Sacrifice in Puritan Typology" in *Sacrifice and Redemption*, ed. Stephen W. Sykes (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), 182-202.

[131] Cf. Henry Scougal, *Life of God in the Soul of Man* (London: 1677), "Love is that powerful and prevalent passion, by *which all the faculties and inclinations of the soul are determined*, and on which both its perfection and its happiness depend," 92. Cited by G. S. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion: Its Place in the Development of Christian Piety* (London: Epworth, 1957), 31. Emphasis mine.

[132] *Works*, 2: 31.

[133] *Works*, 2: 36.

[134] *Works*, 2: 36.

at the character of the Son, his excellencies and "personal grace." Second, the Son's affections for believers are described in detail. Third, communion with the Son through "purchased grace" is developed. Throughout this exploration, and especially in the second and third points, we will see Owen's anthroposensitive theology at work in the form of a dialogue between truths discovered about the Son and how believers should respond to these realities. Here again Owen's anthropological insights as portraying humanity wholly relating to God arise from reflection on God rather than through detached introspection.

The Character of the Son

When describing communion with the Father Owen stresses the idea of love. In so doing, he was not denying the Son or the Spirit's love, since he freely ascribes this attribute to the other persons of the Trinity elsewhere.[135] His point is to stress what believers ought to think specifically of the Father, without taking away from the Son or Spirit. Likewise, in his discussion of the Son, he highlights the idea of grace, although this consistently moves him back to observations about Christ's love. It is not that the Father and Spirit are without grace – for we remain speaking of the one God; nevertheless, "peculiar communion" with the Son is through grace. He interprets John 1 as fully attesting to this reality: Jesus came in "grace and truth" and believers receive "grace for grace." Likewise the apostolic benediction emphasizes this truth by speaking of the "grace of the Lord Jesus Christ."[136] This distinction is also sprinkled throughout Paul's salutations and prophetically in Old Testament texts which pointed to the uniqueness of Jesus. Given these observations, Owen deduces that, while believers are to view the Father peculiarly in his love, they are peculiarly to "eye" in and receive from the Son grace, "revealed in or exhibited by the gospel."[137]

Yet gospel grace only makes sense for Owen when it is grounded in the person of Christ – an emphasis we have seen consistently surfacing throughout our

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[135] E.g., *Works*, 2: 35, 62, 63, 118, 342; 6: 466; 9: 522, etc.

[136] *Works*, 2: 47. The scriptures he uses are John 1:14, 16,17; 2 Cor. 13:14.

[137] *Works*, 2: 47. Just as the believer is encouraged to keep his eye on the Father, so he should continually eye Jesus as well. See also *Works*, 2: 203-06.

study.[138] By looking to Jesus as truly God and truly man one encounters his excellencies. Contemplating these truths will inevitably excite believers and encourage them to "give up themselves to be wholly his."[139] First, one may consider Jesus' deity. Because he is not merely man – contrary to the Socinian description of him as purus homo (merely human) – Jesus is able to be an "endless, bottomless, boundless" source of grace and compassion.[140] Since Jesus as the Son of God does not have a beginning, his love and grace are based in eternity rather than something that arose in first century Palestine. Because this love is eternal and unchangeable, believers are comforted that Christ will not grow weary and abandon them. The love and grace of Jesus is based in his character, and this presents a sharp contrast between his love and that normally expressed by the rest of fallen humanity. "Our love is like ourselves; as we are, so are all our affections."[141] As Owen sees it, the common phenomenon among humanity is that their expressions of love are noticeably fickle and transient, one day loving deeply, the next day showing hatred for the same person. Not so with Jesus, whose character, and thus his love, remains the same (as we already noted with the Father), never having a beginning nor an ending. At this point we may move from noting Jesus' excellencies as displayed in his deity to those displayed in his humanity.

As with his deity, appreciating Jesus' humanity quickens a believer's heart toward communion with the Son. Jesus was free from sin as the Lamb of God without spot or blemish. This is an amazing truth to Owen since, while morally Jesus appears like Adam, his earthly situation was entirely different from Adam's. Adam was created "immediately from the hand of God, without concurrence of any secondary cause," thus securing his purity.[142] As we noted in chapter three, Jesus was not born in paradise, but as Owen here vividly argues, he was "a plant and root out of a dry ground, a blossom from the stem of Jesse, a bud from the loins of sinful man, – born of a sinner, after there had been no innocent flesh in the world for four thousand

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[138] W. Sherlock aggressively attacked Owen's emphasis on "person" as running the risk of divorcing Christ from the "gospel," W. Sherlock, *Union and Communion with him* (1st ed.), *passim ad nauseam*. Owen defends himself throughout his response to Sherlock, e.g., *Works*, 2: 328-331.

[139] *Works*, 2: 59.

[140] *Works*, 2: 61, 68. Cf. Lech Szczuchi, "Socinianism," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand, 4 vols., vol. 1 (Oxford: OUP, 1996), esp. 85-6.

[141] *Works*, 2: 62.

[142] *Works*, 2: 64.

years, every one upon the roll of his genealogy being infected therewithal."[143] It is not a problem, he explains, to imagine a flower growing in paradise, but to have a "spotless bud" arise out of the woods or in the "wilderness of corrupted nature" is enough to cause angels to desire an understanding of this great mystery. All born after Adam were not only defiled, accursed, and unclean, but also guilty of his transgression, since all sinned in him: "That the human nature of Christ should be derived from hence free from guilt, free from pollution, this is to be adored."[144] Since Jesus was "never federally in Adam" he escapes the liability of the imputation of sin which is reckoned to the rest of humanity; sin is only imputed to the one who 'was made sin' by means of his voluntary covenant whereby he is the Mediator.[145]

Not only was Jesus free from sin, but in his human nature he was full of grace. Such an observation is firmly established, for Owen, on a Trinitarian basis. He claims that the incarnate Christ received from the "fountain of grace" the Holy Spirit without measure, since the Father was pleased so to fill the Son. As such Jesus was full of grace and truth, enabling "a certainty of uninterrupted communion with God."[146] The Spirit was the guarantee of the relationship. This fullness allows Jesus uniquely to supply others with the grace and truth they need.

Most astonishing to Owen regarding the excellencies of Jesus' divine and human natures, is that they are united in one person. In this section Owen's reasoning resembles classic formulations, with his obvious indebtedness to Leo whom he twice quotes at length. Owen, apparently trying to model his interpretation on early Patristic (and one might also argue Anselmian) reasoning, concludes: "Had he not been man, he could not have suffered; – had he not been God, his suffering could not have availed either himself or us, – he had not satisfied; the suffering of a mere man could not bear any proportion to that which in any respect was infinite."[147] Given

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[143] *Works*, 2: 64. Throughout *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑ ΠΑΝΤΟΔΑΠΗΙΑ*, e.g., *Works* 17: 183 (*BT*, 247), Owen's familiarity and general agreement with the dating of his contemporary James Ussher's (1581-1656) infamous *Sacred Chronology* is apparent. See Hugh Trevor-Roper, *Catholics, Anglicans, and Puritans: Seventeenth Century Essays* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987), esp. 156-61. Owen would clearly have been familiar with Ussher's work, since the appendix added to it after Ussher's death was created by Thomas Barlow (Owen's former tutor), at that time the Bodleian Librarian, appointed to this position by Owen.

[144] *Works*, 2: 64. He goes on to say that such pollution "was prevented in him from the instant of conception," 65.

[145] *Works*, 2: 65.

[146] *Works*, 2: 66.

[147] *Works*, 2: 67. He cites Leo: "Deus verus, et homo verus in unitatem Domini temperatur, ut, quod nostris remediis congruebat, unus atque idem Dei hominumque mediator et mori possit ex uno, et resurgere possit ex altero," Sermon 1 [see v. 12 in *NPNF2*]. ET: "True God and true human

these reflections, Jesus is a fit mediator, for one cannot understand his grace apart from his person. It is not enough simply to think of his deity, nor only to think of his humanity, but the "treasure of Christ's work" must always be marveled at in light of his *person* which perfectly unites his divine and human natures.[148]

Remembering that for Owen these reflections are under the heading "personal grace," we again see his unwavering commitment to a united Christ, for only through him does humanity gain spiritual understanding. All true knowledge comes only through Christ, including 1) knowledge of God, 2) of ourselves, and 3) knowledge of how to walk in communion with God. All of this knowledge is Christologically based and leads to experiential application.

While creation itself does reveal and testify to many of God's "properties," only in Christ does one learn of God's pardon and mercy. Owen believes that to know the wisdom of God one must look to the crucified Christ.[149] God's particular "love unto sinners" is only discovered in the gospel.[150] The Spirit communicates this truth in scripture – when referring to 1 John 4:8, 16 Owen claims "the Holy Ghost says" – by revealing that God is love, so much so that he sent his Son to die on behalf of sinners.[151] Thus in Christ, sinners learn of God's love and the Spirit of Christ continues to testify to this reality. Beyond simply the property of God's love, one sees more clearly and "savingly" God's vindictive justice[152] in the punishment of sin, his patience, wisdom, and all-sufficiency.[153] In sum, to have a true knowledge of God one must look specifically to Jesus.

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meet in the unity of our Lord, so that, as befitting a remedy for us, one and the same mediator between God and humans was both able to die in virtue of the one nature, and able to rise again in virtue of the other."

[148] See *Works* 2: 48, 68.

[149] *Works*, 2: 79.

[150] *Works*, 2: 81.

[151] *Works*, 2: 81-2. It is common for Owen to employ variations of this formula, "the Holy Spirit says" (cf. Heb. 3:7; 4: 7 [esp. *Works*, 21: 305]; 10:15,16 and Owen's reflections on these verses found in his *Exposition of Hebrews*). Nevertheless, the contemporary commentator should not too quickly read back into Owen an unsophisticated dictation theory. Owen freely acknowledges the different personalities, styles, and emphases of the various authors of scripture. Cf. Gundry, "John Owen on Authority and Scripture," 189-221; idem, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Scriptures: An Original Study of His Approach to the Problem of Authority" (S.T.M. thesis, Union College of British Columbia, 1967); McKim, 195-207.

[152] See Trueman, "John Owen's *Dissertation on Divine Justice*," who rightly argues that Owen's mature understanding of vindictive justice is rooted in God's being rather than a free act of the divine will. "God's hatred of sin must manifest itself in an act of God's will to punish sin. Not to do so would involve a contradiction in God's being," 98. This is most clearly revealed in the atoning work of Christ.

[153] See *Works*, 2: 83-91.

Similarly, only through Christ does a person gain a true knowledge of self, which includes a deeper knowledge of sin, righteousness, and judgement. The Christ who sends his Spirit convinces the world of sin in a way which surpasses the conviction caused by the law and conscience.[154] Human sin and rebellion against God is so serious that the death of Jesus Christ became necessary for fellowship between the divine and human to be reestablished. It should not be thought that the Father delighted in the blood, tears, and cries of his Son any more than he delights in the anguish of any one of his creatures (an idea Owen outrightly rejects). However, since God's justice needed to be satisfied and his law needed fulfillment, the Father, moved by his love, sends the Son who voluntarily seeks to make atonement for a lost people.[155] Thus, by looking to Christ, humanity is confronted by the self-realization that it is unable to make atonement for sin. Apart from Christ there can be no "true saving knowledge of sin," for "in him and his cross is discovered our universal impotency, either of atoning God's justice or living up to his will."[156] Through Christ's life, death, and resurrection sinners learn not only of their need to be freed from guilt, but also of their need to be "actually righteous." Just as clearly as Jesus on the cross demonstrates the reality of human sin, so through his life of obedience does he demonstrate true human righteousness. This righteousness, according to Owen, is made available to those who through faith enjoy the imputation of Christ's righteousness, a theme we have already discussed in chapter four.

Reflecting on the knowledge of God and of oneself gained through Christ naturally leads Owen to apply these ideas to a consideration of how, in Christ, one gains a knowledge of "walking with God." To begin with, just as in any relationship, to walk with God necessitates an agreement between the two parties to walk together. Such agreement, however, would be impossible had not Christ first taken away the cause and continuation of enmity, bringing reconciliation and establishing lasting peace with God. Since God remains wholly loving and just, one cannot approach the Father outside of the blood of Christ – to attempt such a thing would be to undervalue the incarnation and death of Jesus.[157]

Beyond simply agreement, there must be an acquaintance between the two who desire to walk together. Whereas William Sherlock thought Owen's ideas of

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[154] *Works*, 2: 95.
[155] *Works*, 2: 96.
[156] *Works*, 2: 101, 105.

"acquaintance" were suspect to abstract mysticism, Owen correctly understood, uses this language to protect the concrete relational nature between God and his people found in Christ. General revelation and even scripture itself, apart from Christ opening it up, are insufficient: "all the world cannot, but by and in him, discover a path that a man may walk one step with God in."[158] Furthermore, since Christ is the "medium of all communication between God and us" he alone provides the way to walk with God.[159] Believers find strength and confidence to carry on this walking in Christ, keeping their aim the desire to bring glory to God.[160] Walking with God becomes all the more desirable when one's focus moves away from one's own failings and the temptation of legalism to the captivating affections displayed by the Son for believers, a subject to which we now turn.

The Son's Affections for Believers

A common misconception of Puritan theology has suggested that they focused on one's own subjective internal disorders to the neglect of an assurance gained through the person and work of Christ. Usually Calvin is contrasted at this point with later Calvinism, claiming the former was Christocentric while the latter was dangerously anthropocentric.[161] While Owen serves as an example of a Puritan who highly valued Christian experientialism, yet, for the believer, he usually calls for the movement to go *from* Christ *to* himself *back* to Christ, rather than remaining in introspection. Indeed, introspection itself was normally encouraged only from a Christocentric framework in order to avoid moralism. What is clear for our purpose is Owen's emphasis on the objective reality of the Son's affections for believers, a truth he believes brings liberation.

There are four particular expressions of the Son's love for believers: delight, valuation, pity and compassion, bounty. By realizing how Christ graciously gives himself and his love, the natural response of believers is to give and love in return – thus mutual communication is maintained even though it is grounded in and secured

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[157] See *Works*, 2: 107-8.
[158] *Works*, 2: 108, 109.
[159] *Works*, 2: 109.
[160] *Works*, 2: 109-111.
[161] The classic statement expressing this line of argument is found in Kendall's work. For more particular accusations against Owen on this front, see my review of Stover in chapter one.

by divine action.[162] An exploration of each expression of Christ's love will reveal Owen's design.

I. DELIGHT

The depth of the Son's delight in the believer is the basis of any returned delight the believer might express in the Son. Even as we noted regarding the Father, Christ also freely sings and rejoices over the Church.[163] An intimacy is possible between the believer and Christ because the Son of the Father so delights in the children of God. Thus, Christ reveals his "secrets" to his saints and makes it possible for them to reveal the "secrets of their hearts to him."[164] Christ calls believers his friends and so reveals his mind and heart unto them by his Spirit in a way he does not do for those outside the fold. To believers, Christ reveals both himself and his kingdom, which is known through the "government of his Spirit in their hearts."[165]

While communion with the Son must ultimately be mutual, believers communicate with the Son only through divine aid. Here the Spirit of Christ enables believers to commune with God, otherwise their efforts would be futile. When believers go to God expressing their desires, they must always approach with the Spirit's *assistance* and by *way* of the Son. Due to the person and work of the great high priest, believers are enabled not only to approach God, but to do so *boldly* – a theme Owen discusses at length in his Hebrews commentary.[166]

Although this may sound good theoretically, Owen's pastoral experience reminds him that such unhindered communion is the exception rather than the rule. So how should believers respond to these assertions? Owen acknowledges that sin will always try to disturb the rest that believers have when they commune with the Son. Here he makes an important distinction: the problem is not that *Christ's love* fades or lessens with the believer's struggle against sin, but rather the soul becomes distracted or entangled in sin and thus avoids communion. While communion is not purely a human act, it nevertheless takes seriously the human response to God's love; otherwise it ceases to meet the definition of *mutual* relations which Owen established from the beginning. Once the restless soul again allows itself to ponder and accept

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[162] *Works*, 2: 118, 132.
[163] *Works*, 2: 118.
[164] *Works*, 2: 119.
[165] *Works*, 2: 120.
[166] E.g., *Works*, 21: 428-38.

Christ's goodness toward it, a new level of rest and alertness materializes, with a renewed obedience as the natural outflow. Christians tasting such communion seek to avoid temptations which can cause "disturbance of that rest and complacency" found in Christ, avoiding sin not out of fear, but out of a growing desire to have nothing between themselves and their Lord. "A believer that hath gotten Christ in his arms, is like one that hath found great spoils, or a pearl of price. He looks about him every way, and fears every thing that may deprive him of it."[167] The fear of the believer in this quotation is not that Christ is desperately trying to escape their grasp and they must tightly hold on to him – for this is the Son who delights in his people. Rather, believers fear their own waywardness, knowing how often they have been lured by the world and distracted from Christ, only to realize much later how far they have gone from the one they once held so dear.

One must not confuse this discussion of disrupted *communion* with that of undisturbed *union*. At no time is the believer's union with Christ at risk. However, the experiential communion with the Son does wax and wane as commonly attested to in Christian spirituality. Again Owen's realism about human nature prior to glorification prompts him to encourage his readers to be careful in their communion with the Son – not because the Son will arbitrarily depart, but because the human heart so easily strays even from the one who most satisfies it. For the believer, neglecting communion with Christ is like the night, and even when he has tasted communion with the Son he always longs for an even "nearer communion."[168] During times of darkness the believer must willingly engage in self-examination, seeking to discover where he may have gone wrong. Owen is here basing his reflections on the common allegorical reading of Canticles. The woman of the story wanders about seeking the source of her spouse's absence: "have I demeaned myself, that I have lost my Beloved? Where have I been wandering after other lovers?"[169] Sometimes during this lonely season one must show resolution and diligence in seeking Christ afresh. Beyond private introspection, use of the public means of grace (prayer, preaching, and the sacraments) is encouraged. Furthermore, since this is not a question of objective reality – God remains lovingly disposed toward and delighted in the believer who is united to Christ – but of subjective experience, the despairing

[167] *Works*, 2: 126. Cf. Song of Songs, 3: 4.
[168] *Works*, 2: 128, 126.
[169] *Works*, 2: 129.

soul may also turn to a "faithful watchman" who may advise the struggling believer.[170] Here we find classic Puritan pastoral counseling, as the troubled believer explains his condition and gains assistance from one further along in their pilgrimage. These are the ordinary means God employs to redirect his straying sheep.

II. VALUATION

Besides simply delighting in believers, the Son deeply values them. Owen deduces this from several observations. To begin, the fact of the incarnation must proclaim the value placed on believers, otherwise there would never have been any 'exinanition' (*exinanitio* = emptying of the Son).[171] Without the Son's valuing believers he would never have become a servant. Even less would he have done the unthinkable by becoming obedient to death, which ultimately testified that "He valued them above his life."[172] While it appears throughout Owen's corpus that Christ's love is particularly for the Church, that emphasis is strikingly clear in this section. The Son loves his "garden" far more than the "wilderness": "all the world is nothing to him in comparison to them."[173] Employing this idea as a comfort, Owen immediately adds that the weakest believer in the world is still prized by Christ "more than all the world besides." If believers grasped this, Owen explains, they would experience great consolation.

In response to Christ's valuing of believers, they are to value him. Quoting Luther's statement that Jesus is the most beautiful lord (pulcherrimus dominus Jesus),[174] Owen argues that Christ should be valued above all else, including one's own life. When believers discover Christ and the value he has placed on them they should willingly part with whatever brought inappropriate delight to them in former times; "Sin and lust, pleasure and profit, righteousness and duty, in their several conditions, all shall go, so they may have Christ."[175] One must be willing to give up everything to enjoy Christ, otherwise Christ is not one's highest value – a position only the Son of God deserves.

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[170] *Works*, 2: 131. See Timothy J. Keller, "Puritan Resources for Biblical Counseling," *JPP* 9, no. 3 (1988): 11-43.

[171] *Works*, 2: 134. See Heppe, *RD*, 488-94; Muller, *DLGTT*, 110.

[172] *Works*, 2: 135. He concludes: "a death accompanied with the worst that God had ever threatened to sinners, –argues as high a valuation of us as the heart of Christ was capable of."

[173] *Works*, 2: 136.

[174] *Works*, 2: 137.

[175] *Works*, 2: 140.

III. Pity and Compassion

By looking to the incarnate Christ one further sees the Son's affection of pity and compassion toward the believer. Sent by the Father, the Son assumed human nature and gained a "fellow feeling" with humanity, facing temptations and afflictions just as they do. This enables Jesus to have the heart of a sympathetic high priest, one who "grieves and labours with us."[176] Owen nevertheless does admit "there is something in all our temptations more than was in the temptation of Christ," a theme we have already discussed in chapter three.

Because resisting temptation promotes communication with God, Owen describes ways in which he sees the Son aiding believers in their continuing struggle.[177] Christ gives them "a strong habitual bent against sin" and fortifies their hearts with his grace. Sometimes he will give a "strong impulse of actual grace" which will help protect them when they are on the edge of sin. At other times he will actually take away the temptation itself before it overwhelms the soul. When temptations grow Christ will send "fresh supplies of grace" to bring strength to the weary. Wisdom is also often given in order to know how to combat temptation, usually by learning more about oneself. Finally, when overcome by temptation Christ does not hesitate to be there "in his tenderness," bringing relief and pardon.

Not only did the incarnate Son face temptations, he also endured afflictions. From these experiences the Son is able to intercede to the Father on behalf of believers for their relief, "not only in respect of our sins, but also our sufferings."[178] Believers facing afflictions are to respond faithfully to God by not allowing their affections to cling to anything but Christ, and during the difficulty they are to cherish the Spirit whom Christ sent for believers' sanctification and consolation, themes we will discuss below. Therefore it makes sense that they should avoid grieving the Spirit through their unbelief, placing "comforts and joys in other things, and not being filled with joy in the Holy Ghost."[179]

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[176] *Works*, 2: 141.
[177] See *Works*, 2: 143-45.
[178] *Works*, 2: 145.
[179] *Works*, 2: 150, 149.

IV. BOUNTY

Finally, Christ's love and grace toward the saints is expressed in the rich bounty he provides for them. Here we discover what Owen considers to be a great sin of believers: they do not make "use of Christ's bounty as they ought to."[180] Trying to base his conclusions of the character of God in scripture, Owen argues that "whatever he gives us, –his grace to assist us, his presence to comfort us, –he doth it abundantly." For example, believers should not run from Christ, for his grace is like the oil that never runs out. Only from the perspective of the bounty of the Son's resources are believers in a position to seek holiness and obedience "unto Jesus Christ." Obedience is understood in light of the Son, not in order to gain justification, but because the Son has already secured the believer's good standing before God. Since God in Christ accepts believers, their obedience is pleasing to the Son who honors the Father. There seems to be a peculiar relationship, however, between the believer's obedience and Christ. Thus the believer is encouraged in his obedience to view Christ in his bountiful love. As Philippians 1:29 and Hebrews 12:1-2 testify, Jesus is the author not only of faith but also of obedience, since he "adds incense to their prayers, gathers out all the weeds of their duties, and makes them acceptable to God." By obeying Christ believers honor him and show the Son to be equal to the Father, "to whom all honour and obedience is due."[181] Such obedience is possible because of the bountiful resources made available in Christ. Only out of the bounty of Christ's love and grace can the believer seek the fruits of holiness, a quest that will not be fully satisfied until heaven.

Communion with Christ through Purchased Grace

Throughout Owen's writings one often comes across the terms 'purchased' and 'grace,' but only in this book does he put them together as a unit. This phrase serves as a basic summation of the work of Christ, particularly his obedience, his suffering of death, and his continued heavenly intercession.[182] As the second Adam, Jesus needed to live a life of active obedience in order that he might take away believers' unclean robes and replace them with garments of righteousness. This must be understood as a voluntary and active work of Christ, which makes Owen wary of

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[180] *Works*, 2: 152.
[181] *Works*, 2: 153.

employing the classic division of active and passive obedience, for all "obeying is doing."[183] In this way, Jesus is truly the second Adam and not simply a puppet.

Purchased grace is subdivided into three graces. First, since outside of Christ there can be no communion with God, Owen believes that purchased grace removes the alienation caused by sin and provides the *grace of acceptance with God.* Second, the Son does not simply remove believers' sins, but through the *grace of sanctification* "He makes us not only accepted but acceptable."[184] Third, *the grace of privilege* – simply another way of speaking of *adoption* – is discovered by communion with the Son through purchased grace. Since sanctification and obedience are implicitly discussed in other sections, we may skip Owen's second point and focus on his conceptions of acceptance and adoption with God, especially since these two are so closely related and integral to the theme of renewed communion with God.

I. Acceptance with God

Although Owen spends a great deal of time on the theme of acceptance before God, for our purposes we will concentrate on his Trinitarian framework and the response he envisions for believers.

Even though only the Son assumed a human nature and suffered on behalf of God's people, Owen does not want believers to mistakenly think that this means the Son loves believers more than the Father or the Spirit. We have already noted this fear of Owen's in our discussion concerning communion with the Father, and here a similar explanation follows. Given that the purpose of the "dispensation of grace" is to "glorify the whole Trinity," each divine person acts in a distinct yet united way. Employing language of emanation, which might sound reminiscent of Neoplatonism but more likely comes from his studies of the early Fathers, Owen sees the overflow of love moving from Father through the Son and Spirit. "The emanation of divine love to us begins with the Father, is carried on by the Son, and then communicated by the Spirit; the Father designing, the Son purchasing, the Spirit effectually working: which is their order."[185] Here we are reminded of Owen's respect for the idea of the

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[182] See *Works*, 2: 154-68.

[183] *Works*, 2: 163.

[184] *Works*, 2: 170.

[185] *Works*, 2: 180. Jonathan Edwards will later write along similar lines: "There is a natural decency or fitness in that order and oeconomy that is established. It is fit that the order of the acting of the Persons of the Trinity should be agreeable to the order of their subsisting. That as the Father is first

order of subsistence within the Trinity, which is how he explains that the Son became incarnate rather than the Father or the Spirit. Even as the love of God moves as a stream from the Father through the Son by the Spirit, so a believer returns to God by traveling back upstream, rather than trying to jump straight into the river's source. Thus he explains, "our participation is first by the work of the Spirit, to an actual interest in the blood of the Son; whence we have acceptation with the Father."[186] Quickening a person to faith, the Spirit creates an "interest" in the Son and the benefits he secures for believers. One should not become overly chronological at this point because, even though the Spirit begins the movement in a person's heart, this does not occur outside of a Trinitarian structure, for even this work of the Spirit serves as "a fruit and part of the purchase of Christ."[187] The Spirit awakens the believer to the benefits which have already been accomplished for them through Christ's atoning work, and this ultimately leads to the Father's glory with whom they now experience true peace and acceptance. "And thus are both Father and Son and the Holy Spirit glorified in our justification and acceptation with God; the Father in his free love, the Son in his full purchase, and the Holy Spirit in his effectual working."[188] He emphasizes that while it is solely through Christ's death that reconciliation with God is accomplished, one must always seek to make that affirmation within a Trinitarian framework whereby the "whole Trinity" receives glory, and this is protected by acknowledging the triune God's movement in terms of economic ordering. To neglect such reflections will inevitably lead to a false conception of the Father and the Spirit – as if the Son were working alone. This misconception creates not only theological but also pastoral problems that can only be overcome by a renewed Trinitarian emphasis which makes 'purchased grace' understandable.

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in the order of subsisting, so He should be first in the order of acting. That as the other two Persons are from the Father in their subsistence, and as to their subsistence naturally originated from Him and are dependant [*sic*] on Him; so that in all that they act they should originate from Him, act from Him and in a dependence on Him," in *RR*, 71-2.

[186] *Works*, 2: 180.

[187] *Works*, 2: 180.

[188] *Works*, 2: 180. Cf. Wollebius, 164: "The efficient cause of justification, that is, the agent that does it, is the entire Holy Trinity."

In response to the triune God's redeeming activity, believers are to yield obedience unto Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[189] This is because obedience is not concerned primarily with an arbitrary set of rules established in nature, but rather obedience is the triune God's will for his people, based on God's undivided being. Here Owen can speak of the one will of God without shying away from distinguishing between the divine persons. Each appoints and ordains the obedience of believers: Father by way of origin, Son as Mediator, and Spirit as the one who calls believers. Out of his "electing love" the Father chooses some to be holy; from the Son's "exceeding love" some are purified to do good works; and "the very work of the love of the Holy Ghost" is to enable believers to bring forth fruit as he transforms them.[190] So while God does require obedience of his children, he personally makes such a response possible. Christian obedience

> is an eminent immediate end of the distinct dispensation of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in the work of our salvation. If God's sovereignty over us is to be owned, if his love towards us be to be regarded, if the whole work of the ever-blessed Trinity, for us, in us, be of any moment, our obedience is necessary.[191]

Obedience in response to God glorifies each person of the Godhead. By walking with God in this way others will see a believer's life and glorify the Father as a result of what they observe; the obedience offered to the Son is manifested by believing in him, so that others will learn that the Christ was sent by the Father; when one falls into disobedience it grieves the Holy Spirit, but he is glorified when the fruits of obedience are displayed in a Christian's life.

Given this complex understanding of how believers relate to the triune God, it is fascinating to remember Owen's emphasis upon humanity as created in the image of God. Recognizing his Trinitarian emphasis in this treatise, it is fitting that Owen connects the "image" with the triune God. He notes simply that "the Holy Ghost communicates unto us his own likeness; which is also the image of the Father and the Son."[192] Since man reflects the image of the *triune God*, he ought to relate to the different persons of the Trinity distinctly, yet as one (i.e., the triunity of God). Furthermore, all obedience must ultimately be considered "gospel obedience," lest it

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[189] Cf. Works, 17: 418 (*BT*, 605): "Evangelium doctrina est de Deo Patre, Filio, et Spiritu Sancto ejusque cultu, notsrâque obedientiâ ei debitâ." ET: "The gospel is the teaching about God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and about the worship and obedience due to God."

[190] *Works*, 2: 182-83.

[191] *Works*, 2: 183.

[192] *Works*, 2: 243.

fall into legalistic moralism. No obedience may truly honor God outside of the purchased grace of Christ, the empowering of the Holy Spirit, and a knowledge of the Father's love. When obedience is sought after in light of the gospel, the result is a renewal of the image of God in believers, whereby they are conformed to God. This transformation begins when one moves from hostility toward God and into his family, a miraculous event discovered in the idea of adoption.

II. ADOPTION

Communion with the Son includes the privilege of adoption received through grace. Theologically Owen defines adoption as "the authoritative translation of a believer, by Jesus Christ, from the family of the world and Satan into the family of God, with his investiture in all the privileges and advantages of that family."[193] Here the paradigm shift is monumental; he who once was bound in the chains of an oppressive family and existence is freed and brought into the caring household of God. Consequently the believer discovers God as Father, the Son as an elder brother, other saints and even angels becoming fellow children in this kingdom family.[194] In light of this significant shift, the adoption is not only declared to Satan in a judicial manner, but experientially the Spirit of Christ moves in the believer's conscience and heart, testifying to his new familial position with a new name, which is "a child of God."[195]

With adoption comes not only freedom from previous bondage, but a new sense of rights and privileges. Two significant ones are *liberty* and *title*.[196] Beginning with liberty, we see Owen proceed within his Trinitarian framework. Basing his argument on Isa. 41:1 and 2 Cor. 3:17, Owen makes the connection between the idea of the Spirit's presence and the reality of liberty. Only by the anointing of the Spirit was Jesus able to proclaim freedom to the captives. Likewise the Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of adoption: those formally outside of God's family are not only engrafted, but enabled to make the intimate and heartfelt cry "Abba, Father."[197] The Son comes

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[193] *Works*, 2: 207.

[194] *Works*, 2: 209.

[195] *Works*, 2: 210. Owen's idea of a new name is based on Rev. 2: 17.

[196] Owen mentions four originally: liberty, title, boldness, and affliction, but he fails to develop the final two of the list. See *Works*, 2: 221.

[197] *Works*, 2: 211, based on Gal. 4: 6-7. Cf. *Works*, 2: 179 for a Trinitarian emphasis on adoption.

to set the captives free by the Spirit which awakens the heart to sweet intimacy with the Father.

In light of this change, obedience is not sought after because one is a servant, but much more, because one enjoys the reality that "Sons are free."[198] Here Owen sees a difference – somewhat idealized – between slaves and children. Slaves experience freedom from duty, whereas children enjoy freedom in it. While slaves may experience some outward freedom, children enjoy inward spiritual liberty toward God. Whereas slaves might obey in order to avoid punishment, children see obedience as desirable. Here again, Christians are described in response to the triune God. They look at the Father and call out to him, "not in the form of words, but in the spirit of sons." This is possible because the Father always keeps the Son before the believer, knowing that one's whole soul can endlessly delight in Christ.[199]

From this emerges a pattern for obedience which is very different from the stereotyped legalism often alleged of Puritan thought. Children of God are enabled to obey and respond to God *only* if they have first encountered divine love: "From an apprehension of love, [believers] are effectually carried out by love to give up themselves unto him who is love. What a freedom is this!"[200] The movement is *from* God's love for them *to* their love for God and others. In response to God's love manifested on the cross obedience can be done willingly and freely.

Adoption as children not only includes liberty, but also the privilege of a new title. This new title allows believers to partake and have an interest in the family of God. The primary purpose of the preached word is the gathering of the family of God "unto the enjoyment of that feast of fat things which he hath prepared for them in his house."[201] Believers obtain the title of membership in Abraham's family and thus are entitled to the future fulfillment of the inheritance. This title seals Christians as heirs to the promises of God, to righteousness by faith, and final salvation.

Besides the "principal" rights noted above, there are also "consequential" rights for the children of God that pertain to the "things of this world." An Irenaean form of recapitulation seems to surface here as Christ acts as the second Adam over creation. Sin's entrance into the world reversed the whole order of the original

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[198] *Works*, 2: 213. He adds: "there is liberty in the family of God, as well as a liberty from the family of Satan."

[199] *Works*, 2: 215.

[200] *Works*, 2: 215.

[201] *Works*, 2: 216.

creation and humanity forfeited their right to and title of the land. This ushered in chaos and upset the primitive order. However Hebrews 1:2 claims that "Christ was the 'heir of all things'" who has come to undo the curse to which the land was given over. Fallen humanity has lost all title over the creation and so cannot "lay any claim" unto any part of it. "But now the Lord, intending to take a portion to himself out of the lump of fallen mankind, whom he appointed heirs of salvation, he doth not immediately destroy the works of creation, but reserve them for their use in their pilgrimage."[202] The language of a 'lump of fallen humanity' could have several patristic roots, although Owen gives no indication of his source.[203] Not only that, but whereas this language is usually tied up with discussions of the human nature assumed by the Son, Owen here applies it as a relevant bit of data for the rest of creation. Now those who are adopted and find themselves 'in Christ' become by implication "fellow-heirs with Christ."[204] Christ is sovereign and supreme ruler over creation; believers have title to the things of creation, but are also accountable to their Lord.

At this point Owen makes an illuminating deduction: as a result of the fall, only those who are in Christ have any title to creation, and those outside of the faith are "*malae fidei possessores*, invading a portion of the Lord's territories, without grant or leave from him."[205] In God's patience, he allows those who are not adopted to enjoy the land and they are protected in God's providence by civil government. Although believers have a *spiritual* right to the things of creation, they have no *civil* right except that which God has allowed them to acquire through normal means. There can be no seized property in name of the Lord. Nevertheless, all should see creation redeemed in Christ; thus, it is the inheritance of believers who should in turn seek the greater welfare of society by their governance of it to the degree they have opportunity. Whatever God does give believers is theirs by right "as it is re-invested in Christ" and not as it is under the curse. Believers enjoying this privilege are "led unto a sanctified use of what thereby they do enjoy," since these things redeemed in Christ attest to the Father's love. On the other hand, Owen goes as far as to claim that unbelievers "have no true right unto any thing, of what kind soever, that they do

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[202] *Works*, 2: 219.

[203] E.g., T. F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, 153, referencing Basil, *Letter* 261.2 f., in *NPNF2*, v. 8; Weinandy, *In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh*, 32-33, citing Augustine, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, in vol. 7 *NPNF1*, Tractate 4.10. See also Kapic, "The Son's Assumption," 158.

[204] *Works*, 2: 219.

possess."[206] Surely they have a civil right to their possessions, but no "sanctified right." Given this reality, unbelievers will one day be asked to give account for how they used the gifts of God, and Owen sees little hope for their answer.

Owen concludes his reflections on communion with the Son by outlining the fullness of fellowship with the Son made possible through adoption.[207]

Fellowship in name	We are (as he is) sons of God
in title and right	We are heirs, co-heirs with Christ
in likeness and conformity	We are predestinated to be like the first-born of the family
in honour	He is not ashamed to call us brethren
in sufferings	He learned obedience by what he suffered, and every son is to be scoured that is received
in his kingdom	We shall reign with him

This simple chart, which captures the consequences of adoption, quickly illustrates the centrality of Christology as it informs Owen's overall approach to human communion with the triune God. Apart from Christ no union or communion can take place. In Christ, the believer has the privilege to commune with God and to be transformed into his image, preparing to reign with him. Understanding this transformation takes us to our next section, where our focus will be upon communion with the Holy Spirit.

Communion with the Holy Spirit

In the twenty-first century, few would consider an emphasis on the Holy Spirit to be a particular strength of Reformed theology, but this has not always been the case. Calvin himself has been called the "Theologian of the Holy Spirit," a distinction that later Calvinists sought to maintain.[208] B. B. Warfield, the same author who crowned Calvin with this memorable title, elsewhere uses inflated rhetoric in his claim that "the work of the Holy Spirit is an exclusively Reformation doctrine, and more particularly, a Reformed doctrine, and more particularly still a Puritan doctrine."[209] Writing before the expansive literature spurred on by the charismatic

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[205] *Works*, 2: 220, 221.

[206] *Works*, 2: 220: "They have a right and title that will hold plea in the courts of men, but not a right that will hold in the court of God, and in their own conscience."

[207] *Works*, 2: 222.

[208] See B. B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: P & R, 1980), 21.

[209] B. B. Warfield, "Introduction," in Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900), xxxviii.

movement in the twentieth century, this Princeton theologian goes as far as to posit that Puritan thought and imagination, which was so captured by the person and work of the Spirit, possibly represents the doctrine's "highest expression in dogmatico-practical expositions."[210]

Warfield is not alone in his exalted assessment of the importance placed on the Holy Spirit by Puritans. Many have argued that a rediscovery, or at least a renewed zeal for exposition on the person and work of the Holy Spirit, took place in the seventeenth century.[211] In his lengthy essay on William Ames (1576-1633), John D. Eusden makes a similar observation. Eusden argues that a relatively accurate way to begin understanding any major theologian or movement surfaces by asking the following question: *Into which person of the Trinity do they pour most of their creative energies in explorative discussion?* For Augustine, one may think of the role of the Father, whereas for Luther, the incarnate Son on the cross comes foremost to one's mind. But for Calvin and Puritan Reformed theologians, the "Holy Spirit was central; they were concerned especially with the present action of God in the lives of men; they were physicians of the soul analyzing symptoms of spiritual decay and prescribing ways in which religious experience and renewal could take place."[212] While Eusden may rightly see William Ames as a significant figure within this tradition, arguably no seventeenth century Reformed theologian exemplifies this pneumatological focus to the extent of John Owen.

Many others in seventeenth century England wrote on the Holy Spirit, but none so exhaustively as did the 'Calvin of England.' Throughout Owen's life, he penned well over a thousand pages on different aspects of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. These are principally found in Volumes 2-4 of the Goold edition of Owen's *Works*, although one cannot read *any* volume of his expansive writings without his thoughts on pnuematology breaking through. For our purposes, we will maintain a narrow focus primarily on his treatise, *Of Communion*, looking at his view of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, and ending with a review of how believers are to respond to the third person of the Trinity.

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[210] Warfield, "Introduction," xxviii.

[211] E.g., Andrew A. Davies, "The Holy Spirit in Puritan Experience," in *Faith and Ferment*, The Westminster Conference (London: 1982), 18-31; Roger Nicole, "New Dimensions in the Holy Spirit," in *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought*, ed. David S. Dockery (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 331; Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit*, 1-19; Packer, 179-89.

[212] John D. Eusden, "Introduction," in William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 36. Cf. *RR*, 239.

God the Holy Spirit

Speaking of the Father and the Son as *persons* is hardly as conceptually difficult as referencing the Spirit in this fashion. During the seventeenth century a new skepticism was growing among many theologians regarding classical understandings of the Spirit. Some were opting for the old Pneumatomachian heresy of a created Spirit, rather than the eternal third person of the Trinity.[213] Along similar lines, theologians like Episcopius believed that faithfully following biblical testimony pointed not only to an economic, but actually to an ontological subordination which left the Spirit's position somewhat ambiguous.[214] Others reevaluated the biblical language and decided that πνεῦμα referred to a "virtue" of God, rather than to any sort of divine person. According to Owen, all of these conclusions were unacceptable and ultimately damaging to Christian experience.

The Holy Spirit is a person, and rightly acknowledged as such only within a proper Trinitarian theology. Weak or mistaken understandings of the triune God surface most often when discussions of the Spirit arise. To deny the person of the Spirit is actually a denial of the triune God, and thus the end of positive theological reflection. Two exegetical examples from Owen will demonstrate his position on this point. First, Owen follows the classical reading of Acts 5:3-4, arguing that Ananias' lie was particularly to the Holy Spirit (not vaguely to the undifferentiated Godhead). Ananias lied to a distinct divine person, and in so doing, he lied to God.[215] We will discuss below the relation of the Spirit to the other divine persons, but for now we must simply note Owen's acknowledgement of the Spirit's distinct personhood.

At this point, it is useful to draw attention to the importance of pronouns in this discussion, especially considering how seventeenth century Puritans' use of them varies widely when they are referring to the Holy Spirit. For example, Richard Hollinworth interchangeably refers to the Spirit as both "he" and "it."[216] Thomas

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[213] Cf. *RC*, IV.1 [p. 75 note].

[214] Watkin-Jones, 57-9. Episcopius' view was clearly not shared by most of the Remonstrants and is best considered as an extreme, rather than the norm, within early Arminianism.

[215] *Works*, 2: 270.

[216] R. Hollinworth, *The Holy Ghost on the Bench, Other Spirits at the Barre* (1656). Apparently John Bunyan was also not particular about using personal and impersonal pronouns when referring to the Spirit, Watkin-Jones, 136.

Goodwin and John Howe normally refer to the Spirit as "him."[217] Geoffrey Nuttall similarly adds that Richard Sibbes also tends to refer "to the Holy Spirit as both 'it' and 'him'; Baxter appears usually to call the Spirit 'it'; Owen always 'him'."[218] While we agree with Nuttall's assessment in general, there is an exception to this rule in Owen's writings. Even Owen's precise mind is open to slippage on this point. The fact that he so often works with Greek texts and thus thinks of πνεῦμα as neuter rather than masculine may also help explain the rare inconsistency. Surfacing within this discussion regarding Ananias one reads: "The person of the Holy Ghost, revealing *itself*," but by the next sentence Owen jumps back into his modus operandi of referring again to the Spirit as 'he.' Applying a hermeneutic of generosity, it seems best to take Owen's standard phraseology (i.e., 'he') as his preferred manner of referring to the Spirit. As such, this slip is best read as an inadvertent inconsistency rather than a conscious restatement. Such an observation, however, highlights far more than Owen's standard vocabulary: it also signifies his insistence on always treating the Spirit as a *person* rather than a thing or vapor. Applying the personal pronoun seems useful in maintaining this distinction. Accordingly, when Ananias lied to the Holy Spirit, "he [Ananias] sinned peculiarly against him [Holy Spirit]."[219] By deduction, to sin against the Holy Spirit is to sin against a divine person, and to sin against a divine person is to sin against the triune God.

This takes us to the second exegetical example: the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt. 12:31-32; Mk. 3:29; Lk. 12:10). In this treatise Owen is less concerned with *what* this sin is, focusing instead on *why* it is unpardonable. His answer is simple: when you sin against the Spirit you uniquely sin against the triune God. Let us follow his logic. The Spirit does not come *only* by his own will or in his own name (though this is not to deny his will and name), but rather "in the name and authority of the Father and Son, from whom and by whom he is sent." Owen adds,

> to sin against him is to sin against all the authority of God, all the love of the Trinity, and the utmost condescension of each person to the work of salvation. It is, I say, from the authoritative mission of the Spirit that the sin against him is peculiarly unpardonable; – it is a sin against the recapitulation of the love of the Father, Son, and Spirit.[220]

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[217] E.g., Thomas Goodwin, *The Work of the Holy Ghost in Our Salvation*, ed. John C. Miller, 12 vols., *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1861-66); John Howe, *The Living Temple*, 8 vols., *The Works of John Howe*, vol. 3 (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1862).

[218] Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit*, 141.

[219] *Works*, 2: 270.

[220] *Works*, 2: 229.

In other words, to sin against the Holy Spirit is to deny God's loving movement toward fallen humanity. It is to accuse the triune God of not caring enough for his creation, to deny the outward operations of the "whole Trinity," in the end demonstrating "contempt" toward "their [i.e., Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] ineffable condescension to the work of grace."[221] In sum, it is to deny God's redemptive activity in reconciling the world to himself. Such a rejection of God seems to Owen, not only unthinkable, but unpardonable as well.

A brief look at the Spirit's relation to the Father and Son will lay the groundwork for Owen's particular concern of distinct communion with the Spirit. As we noted in the beginning of this chapter, even though Owen is seeking to explore "distinct" communion with the persons of the Trinity, he is theologically cautious in this endeavor. We see this caution arise most clearly at the beginning and end of the book. When discussing the Spirit he recognizes the heightened opportunity for debate and misunderstanding; thus he attempts to protect his work from objection by defining his parameters.

Owen affirms the Western conception of the *filioque*, since he believes the Spirit is sent from both the Father and the Son. The Father is the fountain of the Spirit's coming in a twofold procession: in respect to 1) the Spirit's personality or substance, and 2) the οἰκονομίκη concerning the work of grace.[222] In this context, Owen simply states, rather than defends, the first of these, which refers to the eternal procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son. Moving to the topic of the Spirit's work in the economy of salvation, Owen adds some reflective remarks which attempt to hold together the Spirit's personality, his relationship to the Father and Son, and implications for the believer's view of the Spirit.

Christ promises to send the Spirit, which is thus commonly called the 'Spirit of Christ.' Coming from the Son, the Spirit's comforting presence among the Church should be viewed as "better and more profitable for believers than any corporeal presence of Christ," since the once-for-all sacrifice has been offered.[223] With this in mind, the Spirit moves to continue the work of the triune God by testifying to the

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[221] *Works*, 2: 229.

[222] *Works*, 2: 226.

[223] *Works*, 2: 226. Cf. Thomas Goodwin, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven, Towards Sinners on Earth...* in *Works of T. Goodwin*, who, putting words into the mouth of Jesus, claims that the Spirit,

person and work of Christ. This testimony of the Spirit should not be viewed in terms of "his eternal procession, but of his actual dispensation."[224] Owen finds John 16:7 – which speaks of Christ's coming departure to make room for the Spirit's condescension – helpful in seeing the connection between the so-called ontological and economic Trinity: "this relation *ad extra* (as they call it) of the Spirit unto the Father and the Son, in respect of operation, proves his relation *ad intra*, in respect of personal procession."[225] Here we see how Owen's logic moves backward, from the external works of God to the internal, establishing the Spirit's ontological relationship to the Father and Son. This connection is what allows for the believer's communion with the Spirit, since the only appropriate worship is worship of God.[226]

According to Owen, one danger in pneumatological discussions is the tendency to reduce the Spirit into something created, or inferior in divine essence, or simply "a mere servant." Such portrayals downplay the Spirit's "will" in the work of salvation. Here Owen is unhesitant to speak of the Spirit's will, just as elsewhere he speaks of the will of the Father and the will of the Son. The reason for this language comes from Owen's respect for the freedom of God in redemptive activity. Just as the Father freely sends, so the Son is free even though he is sent, enabling him to voluntarily lay down his life for others. Likewise, "the Father's and Son's sending of the Spirit doth not derogate from his [i.e., the Spirit's] freedom in his workings, but he gives freely what he gives."[227] By making such a claim, is Owen moving toward tritheism? He would certainly deny the charge. Although he uses language that points toward three wills, he grounds such a discussion in the following presupposition: "The will of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is essentially the same; so that in the acting of one there is the counsel of all and each freely therein."[228] So the Spirit comes not reluctantly, but "He, of himself and of his own accord, proceedeth."[229]

"who by reason of his office, will comfort you better than I should do with my bodily presence," 4: 101.

[224] *Works*, 2: 227.

[225] *Works*, 2: 227.

[226] Cf. *Works*, 2: 270: "the formal reason of our worshipping the Holy Ghost is not his being our comforter, but his being God." He then adds that worship directed to the Holy Spirit "is no less directed, on that account, to the other persons than to him."

[227] *Works*, 2: 235.

[228] *Works*, 2: 235.

[229] *Works*, 2: 227. One wonders if recent attempts to reformulate a basic Trinitarian approach that more clearly accents the equality of the Spirit stems from previous theologians' failure to keep the

Working from within a covenant framework which extends into eternity, Owen sees the order of subsistence inform the economic workings of the Godhead: God's electing love springs from the Father's eternal purpose (πρόθεσις) and love, the Son's requesting (ἔρωτησις) that his death might benefit the Church, and the Spirit's "willing proceeding" (ἐκπόρευσις) to apply the work of Christ to believers, bringing needed comfort to them until the day of glory. From this basic structure we can finally complete Owen's outline of distinct communion: "our peculiar communion with the Father in *love*, the Son in *grace*, and the Holy Ghost in *consolation*."[230] Having briefly looked at the person of the Holy Spirit, we may now proceed to an analysis of the Spirit's work.

The Work of the Spirit

When describing the work of the Holy Spirit Owen discusses various ideas at length.[231] For our purposes we shall focus on how his presentation remains Christologically grounded and experientially sensitive. Along the way we shall draw attention to Owen's guidance on how believers may "test the spirits."

While the Holy Spirit is distinct from the Son, this distinction should not cause a chasm between the two. When the Spirit came after the incarnate Son's departure he came to enable the remembrance of the things of Christ, overcoming frail minds and disjointed memories.[232] Only when this testimony to the Son is recognized can the Spirit's role as Comforter be accomplished, for there is no true rest and consolation outside of Christ. Moving powerfully in believers' lives, the Spirit overcomes their despair when the "heavens are black over them, and the earth trembles under them," reminding them of the promises of Christ.[233] But there is no magic spell or incantation to guarantee the Spirit's movement, for as already noted, the Spirit retains true freedom even in consolation. This allows him to bring comfort freely, even when it is not expected, which may partly explain the seasonal nature of Christian experience. Nevertheless, when comfort arrives there is no mistaking it, for

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kind of emphasis on divine freedom that Owen strives to maintain. Cf. Weinandy, *The Father's Spirit of Sonship*.

[230] *Works*, 2: 228.

[231] Nine themes of the Spirit's activity, covering everything from the Spirit as Teacher to being anointed and sealed by the Spirit, are covered in Owen's exposition. See *Works*, 2: 236 ff.

[232] *Works*, 2: 236.

[233] *Works*, 2: 238.

it will inevitably come in the form of the promises of Christ, which are the "breasts of all our consolation."[234]

Since the Spirit's work is *always* to glorify Christ, this provides a clear way to test the spirits. Does the spirit bring the person and work of Christ, as attested to in scripture, to one's mind? Does he glorify Christ? If a spirit gives "new revelations" which subtly, or not so subtly, point away from Christ and the written word, then he is a false spirit.[235] The Spirit of God will *never* draw worship away from Christ, and if a spirit does, one may confidently assert that he is not the Holy Spirit: "we may see how far that spirit is from being the Comforter *who sets up himself in the room of Christ.*"[236] Again, although Owen holds to distinct communion, he is grounded in the conviction of no *separation* within the Godhead. And if a spirit draws attention and worship away from Christ, he simply cannot be the true Spirit; as we noted in the beginning, any true worship of one divine person is worship of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If this is not the case one moves toward tritheism and away from biblical monotheism, which explains Owen's uncompromising position regarding the relationship between the Spirit and the Son.

By persuading believers of God's love expressed in the promises of Christ, the Spirit convinces them of God's particular kindness toward them. Capturing all of one's "faculties and affections" with this revelation, the Spirit brings delight to the weary soul.[237] Again, the Christian is equipped to test the spirits. The result of the Spirit's movement of "shedding God's love abroad" in one's heart is *freedom* in Christ, whereas a false spirit only brings *bondage.* Here Owen is taking a sideswipe at the Enthusiasts of his day, who "make men quake and tremble; casting them into an un-son-like frame of spirit, driving them up and down with horror and bondage, and drinking up their very natural spirits, and making their whole man wither away."[238] One must remember that William Sherlock includes Owen in the enthusiasts' camp

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[234] *Works*, 2: 239. Thomas Goodwin also uses this vivid expression when discussing communion with God, *Of the Object and Acts of Justifying Faith*, in *Works of T. Goodwin*, 8: 393. For an interesting exploration by a neo-Freudian who attempts to make sense of such explicit language, see David Leverenz, *The Language of Puritan Feeling: An Exploration in Literature, Psychology, and Social History* (New Brunswick: RUP, 1980).

[235] *Works*, 2: 257.

[236] *Works*, 3: 239. Emphasis mine.

[237] *Works*, 2: 240.

[238] *Works*, 2: 258. For an excellent sampling of 17th century Enthusiasm, see Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Studies in Christian Enthusiasm: Illustrated from Early Quakerism* (Wallingford, Penn.: Pendle Hill, 1948). The early Quakers are the most famous of the 'Enthusiasts.' See also Hugh

because of the intimate and somewhat mystical language the Puritan uses to describe intimacy with God. But here is the fundamental difference: contrary to the tendency among 'Enthusiasts,' Owen's mysticism affirms human faculties and sees communion only occurring by their proper operation. For Owen, the Holy Spirit engages all of a believer's natural faculties as created in the image of God, whereas false spirits move against them. This helps explain why Owen reacted so harshly against two Quaker women, Elizabeth Fletcher and Elizabeth Homes, who came and caused a major stir at Oxford while Owen was vice-chancellor. Both women seemed to act completely irrationally, according to Owen; Fletcher even removed her clothing, and "walked semi-naked through the streets proclaiming the terrible day of the Lord."[239] Such behavior indicated, not a person acting like an Old Testament prophet, but someone following a false spirit. Those who follow after false spirits are forced to deny their true humanity by suppressing their mind, will, and affections, showing little physical control, and therefore attempting to commune with God in a manner outside of the original created order. Part of the Spirit's sanctifying work in believers is to renew their damaged faculties so that they are restored in a God-ward direction. Mutual communication between God and humanity assumes the believer's active participation which encompasses, rather than suppresses, his whole being. In Owen's mind, these false spirits inevitably bring cruelty and bondage rather than the freedom experienced when a believer is fully engaged – *via* his natural faculties – in communion with God.

Prior to glorification believers experience their freedom in Christ because the Spirit is given as an earnest (ἀρραβών).[240] Owen defines an earnest, or a pledge, as something given to someone, assuring the full and final payment to come. Even as an earnest must be of the "same kind and nature" as the final promise, so believers receive the Spirit who enables enjoyment of God even in the midst of continued battles with sin. By receiving the Spirit, believers gain an "acquaintance with" both the love of God and their inheritance. Enjoyment of God is found in recognizing the Spirit's movement in one's life, preparing one for eternal and unhindered communion with God. Such communion grows in intimacy through prayer, which helps explain why the Spirit stirs the heart in this devotional discipline. Consequently, another sign

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Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England* (New Haven: YUP, 1964); Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (London: Temple Smith, 1985), esp. 35-37.

[239] Toon, *God's Statesman*, 76.

of a false spirit is that he does not show himself as the Spirit of supplication. Whereas the false spirit belittles "such low and contemptible means of communion with God," acting as if there is a higher avenue, the Holy Spirit helps one carry out the spiritual duty of prayer, "exalting all the faculties of the soul for the spiritual discharge" of this exercise.[241] Prayer is the appointed means of maintaining communion with God whereby the soul receives God's love through the intimacy of being in the Father's bosom. "The soul is never more raised with the love of God than when by the Spirit taken into intimate communion with him in the discharge of this duty."[242] Owen's conviction that the 'mystical' experience of communion with God must be realized *in* – rather than *against* – the ordinary means of grace (e.g., prayer, preached word, and sacraments) is clearly demonstrated in this context.

He does not deny human intimacy with the divine, but instead defines the parameters for experiencing true fellowship with God. Owen's clear motive is to avoid what he thinks are the extremes that the Church must always resist when discussing the Holy Spirit. Satan has consistently used excesses to point the Church away from the true Spirit. The first extreme Owen mentions concerns those who "decry" the "gifts and graces" of the Holy Spirit, especially in public worship, by employing "an operose form of service."[243] In this way, dependence on the Spirit's ministry and gifting is lessened, leaving instead a sophisticated liturgy devoid of spiritual power. One result of this extreme is that the Spirit is neglected, and those who seek the Spirit or claim to be full of the Spirit are scorned. Apparently Owen believes that this was a significant temptation to previous generations of the Church. Instead of responding with fear and mistrust toward the spiritual, Owen boldly proclaims: "Let us be zealous of the gifts of the Spirit, not envious at them."[244] On the other hand, Owen believes another extreme was growing rapidly in his own day, whereby Satan's tactic moved from outrightly opposing the Spirit to masquerading as him.[245] This is why Owen provides reflections on how to test the spirits, as we noted above. He wants Christians to be open to the Spirit without being drawn away by imposters. Looking at Owen's contrasting of the two approaches of Satan

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[240] *Works*, 2: 245-46.
[241] *Works*, 2: 258, 249.
[242] *Works*, 2: 249.
[243] *Works*, 2: 255.
[244] *Works*, 2: 256.
[245] *Works*, 2: 256.

demonstrates his desire to acknowledge the continued active work of the Spirit without embracing seventeenth century extremes of enthusiasm.[246]

Satan's working of extremes	
Then:	**Now:**
Cry up ordinances without the Spirit	Cry up a spirit without and against ordinances
A ministry without the Spirit	A spirit without a ministry
Reading of word enough, without preaching or praying by the Spirit	The Spirit is enough, without reading or studying the word
Allowed a literal embracing of what Christ had done in the flesh	Talks of Christ in the Spirit only, denying he came in the flesh

Owen concludes: "Thus hath Satan passed from one extreme to another, – from a bitter, wretched opposition to the Spirit of Christ, unto a cursed pretending to the Spirit; still to the same end and purpose."[247] Believers must carefully avoid following Satan's extremes, instead relying on the Spirit of Christ who draws his people into deeper fellowship with God.

Response to the Spirit

Having spent time reflecting on the person and work of the Spirit, what implications does Owen draw for human experience? Just as one needs to make a distinction between union and communion with God, Owen calls on his readers to distinguish between receiving the Spirit of sanctification and of consolation. While one and the same Spirit, there remains a distinction. Using Ezekiel's imagery of the valley of dead bones, Owen claims that the "Spirit of sanctification" makes live what was dead, and in doing so the recipient is necessarily and merely passive, "as a vessel receives water."[248] Once made alive in this manner, the Spirit acts for believers' consolation, but in so doing there is an "active power put forth in his reception."[249] What Owen means by this activity is an exercise or "power of faith," a believing in the Spirit promised in the covenant (cf. Eph. 1:13). Once enlivened, the believer cannot be a mere passive participant, but rather is called on to actively seek the Spirit.

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[246] See *Works*, 2: 257.
[247] *Works*, 2: 258.
[248] *Works*, 2: 231.
[249] *Works*, 2: 231.

Recognizing this dynamic of communion with the Spirit, one is now able to discuss the consequences of this relationship.

The primary characteristic of the Spirit's movement is consolation. Consolation from the Spirit should be *abiding* because it is based on God's everlasting faithfulness; *strong*, since it comes from the sovereign God who overcomes all; *precious*, since it is experienced in relationship to Christ.[250] Therefore, while Christ is the Redeemer and Saviour of the Church, the Spirit is her Comforter. From this consolation comes peace and friendship with God – experiencing divine acceptance remains impossible without the Spirit. Peculiar communion with the Spirit comes when he comforts believers during their afflictions, grief over sin, and through their efforts toward obedience. Afflictions are unavoidable for everyone, and while people tend towards extremes when faced by them – either despising them as if they were not from God, or sinking under their weight – through the Spirit, such times should drive one to a sweet communion with God.[251] When one tries to "manage" situations apart from the Spirit, Owen believes there can be no true rest for the soul. Similarly, sin appears as an unbearable burden apart from the movement of the Spirit: "Our great and only refuge from the guilt of sin is the Lord Jesus Christ; in our flying to him, doth the Spirit administer consolation to us."[252] Here again, Owen's awareness of extremes is apparent; apart from the Spirit, sin will either harden a person or cause them to neglect the means to resist temptation. In other words, with or without the Spirit, the same experiences come to all. The only question is whether one seeks the Spirit's consolation during these times.

Another consequence of communion with the Spirit is joy. The Spirit may work immediately or mediately to bring this about. *Immediately* signifies times when the Spirit himself comes with intensity, "without the consideration of any other acts or works of his, or the interposition of any reasonings, or deductions and conclusions."[253] These experiences, which usually arise unexpectedly and overwhelmingly, give renewed consideration to the love of God. On the other hand, the Spirit also works *mediately*, bringing a fresh sense of God's love through a renewed consideration of the believer's acceptance as a child of God. Even so, rational consideration of the promises of God apart from the Spirit's movement will

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[250] *Works*, 2: 251.
[251] *Works*, 2: 259-60.
[252] *Works*, 2: 261.

fail to affect the heart, thus leaving it without joy and peace. Whether immediately or mediately, the action of the Spirit is the pivotal issue. The Spirit arouses hope in the heart of the believer who expectantly waits in assurance, bringing a sense of boldness to an otherwise fearful soul.

Finally, Owen observes that scripture uses negative commands to express communion with the Spirit, although always accompanied by positive duties. He is referring to three pronounced warnings in the New Testament: do not grieve the Holy Spirit, (Eph. 4:30), do not quench him (1 Thess. 5:19), and do not resist him (Acts 7:51).[254] "Grieving" refers to the Spirit's person who dwells in believers, whereas "quenching" the Spirit refers more particularly to his "motions of grace." Similarly "resisting" refers primarily to the Spirit's work through the word of God, and as such manifests itself in those who show contempt for the preached word. To avoid these obstacles to communion with the Spirit, one must seek "universal holiness" in response to the love of the Spirit who "is striving with us" through one's growth in grace, since all movement in grace stems from the action of the Spirit.[255] Humbly placing oneself under the normal means of grace also promotes continued growth in communion with the Spirit.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have covered considerable ground by following Owen's attempt to employ Trinitarian reflections for the encouragement of believers. Whereas we began by quoting Kant's belief that "absolutely nothing worthwhile for the practical life can be made out of the doctrine of the Trinity," Owen's entire book is motivated by the belief that this doctrine speaks powerfully about a person's relationship to God. Since God has revealed himself, not as an undifferentiated Godhead but as triune, Owen calls for believers to consider how they may commune with the three persons without abandoning the unity of God. We found him arguing against a distant deity unconcerned with the affairs of the world, instead presenting a triune God whose loving movement toward humanity brings about the possibility of communion between the divine and human. Rather than angry and arbitrary, Owen portrays the Father as the fountain or ocean of love, overflowing not simply to the

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[253] *Works*, 2: 252.
[254] *Works*, 2: 264-68.
[255] *Works*, 2: 266.-67.

other persons of the trinity, but to the world. As the Son delights in the Father, he willingly comes as the 'sent one' whose unique person makes it possible for him to act as the Mediator. Consequently the Son, out of his own delight, acceptance, and love for his people is able to secure the redemption of the Church. Deserving of equal honor and worship with the Father and the Son, the believer also communes with the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity constantly works to draw believers to Christ where they may find comfort during their earthly pilgrimage. In sum, we have focused on Owen's hope that believers equipped with a proper Trinitarian appreciation of the love, grace, and consolation of God will find themselves in intimate communion with him. With this background we turn now to our final chapter in which we explore the theme of signs which point to continuing communion with God.

Chapter 6

Signs of Continuing Communion
Lord's Day and Lord's Supper

"All duties proper and peculiar to this day are duties of communion with God. Everlasting, uninterrupted, immediate *communion with God is heaven.*"
JOHN OWEN[1]

"There is, in the ordinance of the Lord's supper, an especial and peculiar communion with Christ, in his body and blood, to be obtained. One reason why we so little value the ordinance, and profit so little by it, may be, because we understand so little of the nature of that special communion with Christ which we have therein."
JOHN OWEN (1669)[2]

Introduction

Since Owen focuses his attention on communion with God as presently experienced by believers, we will close our study by looking at further signs of renewed relations. Although many themes from Owen's writings might illustrate communion with God prior to glorification, we have chosen two that will serve well in concluding our study. Both subjects describe the believer's experience of communion with God through ordained patterns of worship: a day of rest and the Lord's supper.[3] Each topic serves as a means for encouraging believers by emphasizing Christ through whom communion with God is enjoyed. Worshipers are primarily reminded by the Lord's day of the original goodness of creation and human rest which is found in God but necessarily renewed through Christ. Similarly, the Lord's supper points believers to the goodness of the new creation in Christ who incorporates his people into himself, enabling them to enjoy the intimate love of God. While covering both of these topics which were – and often still are – considered highly controversial, we will keep our focus, for the most part, on the particular concern of relations and how Christ provides the bridge between God and humanity.

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[1] Owen, *Works*, 19: 452. Emphasis mine.
[2] Owen, *Works*, 9: 523.

Day of Sacred Rest

During the seventeenth century, many debates took place regarding the question of the Sabbath's remaining significance for the Christian community. This debate included both theological and social questions. What is the relationship between the Old and New Testament? How are law and gospel related? When should corporate worship take place? Does this day of sacred rest belong to the Church only, or to the entire world? Can one work and play on the day set-aside for corporate worship? At the heart of the debate is the question: if the fourth commandment was not absolutely abolished in Christ but rather points back – at least in part – to a creation ordinance, what are the implications for the Church and society at large? Several significant studies have covered these debated questions, looking not only at Puritanism in general, but also to the predecessors who influenced their thought.[4] Among these examinations Owen receives little extensive coverage.

Since our concern in this section is simply to outline how Owen's conception of a day of rest fits into his understanding of communion with God, we may avoid many of the more general questions noted above. Instead, we will quickly move through several key themes found in Owen's writings on the subject: his belief that this day of rest is a creation ordinance, that the Church must view the idea of rest Christologically within the history of redemption, and that this theological motif must necessarily highlight eschatological implications for struggling believers living in the

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[3] Since Owen does not normally capitalize supper, we will also refrain from doing so.

[4] E.g., the three historical chapters by Richard Bauckham in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 251-341; James Dennison, *The Market Day of the Soul* (Landham, Maryland: 1983); Patrick Collinson, "The Beginnings of English Sabbatarianism," in *Studies in Church History*, ed. C. W. Dugmore and Charles Duggan, vol. 1 (London: T. Nelson, 1964), 207-21; Robert Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: 1865); Richard Gaffin, *Calvin and the Sabbath* (Fearn: Mentor, 1998); R. L. Greaves, "The Origins of English Sabbatarian Thought," *HJ* 23 (1980): 17-35; Peter Heylyn, *The History of the Sabbath* (London: 1636); Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York: Schnocken Books, 1964), ch. 5; David S. Katz, *Sabbath and Sectarianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988); Kenneth L. Parker, *The English Sabbath: A Study of Doctrine and Discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988); John Primus, "Calvin and the Puritan Sabbath," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. D. E. Holwerda (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 40-75; Winton U. Solberg, *Redeem the Time: The Puritan Sabbath in Early America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Keith Sprunger, "English and Dutch Sabbatarianism and the Development of a Puritan Social Theology, 1600-1660," *CH* 51, no. 1 (1982): 24-38; W. B. Whitaker, *Sunday in Tudor and Stuart Times* (London: The Houghton Publishing Co., 1933). Bobick, Appendix A, "Owen's Sabbath Argument," 249-63, is the most extensive on Owen, but his stated concern is "not so much its content but Owen's method of establishing a theological position," 249. Bobick is looking for signs of Ramist bifurcations in Owen's argument and says nothing of real bearing on our study. See also Wong, 157-62, 336-42.

present.[5] By exploring this material we will demonstrate how Owen employs the day of rest in light of his underlying concern for communion between God and humanity. This theme links Owen's anthropology and discussion of relations between God and humanity: the day of rest which exemplifies communion with God begins with creation, is disrupted by the fall, redeemed in Christ, and continues until fully realized in heaven.

A Creation Ordinance

When approaching the creation narrative, readers familiar with the text face the danger of overlooking some striking revelations. According to Owen, possibly the most staggering of these revelations is the idea of *God's* rest on the seventh day. In fact, part of the goodness of creation includes this day of rest. Encompassing not only the idea of God's satisfaction with his creation, this rest also represents his original desire for humanity to enter into the "enjoyment of that rest . . . in and with God himself."[6] God not only rested on that day, he was "refreshed," taking "great complacency" in his works (Ex. 31:17).[7] Similarly interpreting Zeph. 3:17, Owen believes that God rests "in his love," for he "rejoice[s] with singing" over his work.[8]

Any discussion of *human* rest, let alone a day of sacred rest, must accordingly begin with an emphasis on *God's* rest.[9] While Owen believes the day of rest is a creation ordinance and not an arbitrary later addition – here he follows the basic position laid out by scholastic theologians, both Roman Catholic and Protestant[10] –

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[5] While Owen discusses the idea of Sabbath in various places, the two most enlightening come from his seven volume commentary on Hebrews. His *Exercitations concerning the Name, Original, Nature, Use, and Continuance of a Day of Sacred Rest. . . .*, *Works*, 19: 261-460, serves as one of the preliminary treatises preceding his verse by verse commentary (there are two entire volumes, approximately 550 pages each, containing six 'Preliminary Exercitations'). The second source is found in his verse by verse commentary, most clearly expounded in his exegesis of Hebrews 4. See esp. *Works*, 21: 197-346.

[6] *Works*, 19: 266.

[7] *Works*, 19: 334. Even though there may be an "anthropopathy" allowed here, the language of "refreshment" should not be read as intending "weariness" on God's part, but rather as describing God's cessation from his work of creation. See *Works*, 21: 284.

[8] *Works*, 19: 334.

[9] Cf. *Works*, 21: 273-74.

[10] E.g., *Works*, 19: 287, 300, 308, etc. Bobick, 254-56, argues that Owen departs from Calvin at this point. Cf. Gaffin, 25, 30-32, 127, 149-50. See Calvin, *Institutes*, II.8.28-34. Despite the longstanding myth that a doctrine of a morally binding Sabbath was a Puritan innovation, there is clearly a Medieval tradition of general Sabbatarianism (e.g., Aquinas) which is quickly picked up again by many leaders of the post-reformation era (e.g., Beza and Bullinger) who influenced much of Protestantism in general, and Puritanism in particular. Likewise, it is inaccurate to claim this as a Puritan innovation used to divide the conformists and nonconformists, much less a means employed by

the reason for its prominent place in the natural order comes from the fact that it serves as an expression of divine perfection. God's rest provides the foundation for humanity's rest and true happiness.[11] A human, unlike angels who have the capacity for "constant contemplation," is a "middle creature," which means he is "composed partly of an immortal soul, of a divine extract and heavenly original, and partly of a body made out of the earth."[12] According to Owen, such a dualistic design naturally leads to the division of work partly "divine" and partly "terrene and earthly."

While humanity is designed to work six days a week, they are also created to benefit from a Sabbath: a unique day of sacred rest was beneficial for humanity even before the fall. This does not place the day above humanity, but rather serves as part of the natural design by which humanity worships the God of creation.[13] Since each person was created relationally as a rational creature in the image of God, each is likewise enabled to respond to God through worship.[14] As such, the day was given for all of creation – not simply Israel[15] – and exists as part of the natural order. Consequently, this day must be understood as a positive moral law.[16] Confusion and debate over the distinctions between natural, moral, and positive laws have a long history. Here Owen follows an argument similar to that found in the influential work of Daniel Cawdrey and Herbert Palmer. In their *Sabbatum Redivivum* they modify the traditional categories and argue that positive and moral laws need not be exclusive;[17] Owen employs this line of argument. Using this combination of positive *and* moral, Owen constructs a space to make a crucial distinction about the Sabbath. He affirms *a* day to rest as part of the creation order (i.e., moral), while at the same time arguing that *the specific* day on which this should be practiced was dependent upon God's clear command (i.e., positive), and may therefore be changed. Employing these technical theological distinctions, Owen discusses the differences between moral and positive laws, and those which are mixed: "for there may be in a divine law a foundation in and respect unto somewhat that is moral, which yet may

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Puritans to undermine the established Church's authority. Most helpfully see Parker. Cf. Collinson, "English Sabbatarianism."

[11] *Works*, 19: 333, 301.

[12] *Works*, 19: 315.

[13] *Works*, 19: 332, 263, 403.

[14] *Works*, 19: 336-37.

[15] *Works*, 19: 291.

[16] Cf. *Works*, 19: 328, 347, etc.

stand in need of the superaddition of a positive command for its due observation unto its proper end."[18] While a day of rest is part of moral law, the "precise observation of the seventh day" is not part of this natural law and thus changeable.[19] Whether humanity sets aside Saturday, Sunday, or some other day of the week, what was fundamental to the design of creation was that a day be set apart to enter God's rest, primarily through corporate public worship.[20] This original rest included "1. peace with God; 2. Satisfaction and acquiescency in God; 3. Means of communion with God. All these were lost by the entrance of sin, and all mankind were brought thereby into an estate of trouble and disquietment."[21] For Owen, employing this general link to the natural order partly explains why people throughout history have expressed and acted on a need to set apart sacred days in a vague attempt to find peace with the divine.[22]

Humanity's need for work and a Sabbath rest did not change at the fall, but their "state or condition" did change.[23] Not only did the fall make labor difficult and troublesome, it also disrupted the natural ability of human persons to find their rest in God. Idolatry and impiety cause humanity's enjoyment of God through the Sabbath rest to become corrupt and lost.[24] Either sin produces a break in communion between God and humanity: one because humans replace the true God with a false one, the other by denying God's wisdom and guidance for human life.

Here again, Owen reasserts his belief that this rest is directly related to communion with God, for he denies that anyone can recognize the true Sabbath without first knowing God. In other words, the sin of neglecting the Sabbath is of secondary importance; it is a consequence of the greater problem that a person does not "know and own the true God, and him alone."[25] Elsewhere, Owen makes a

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[17] Daniel Cawdrey and Herbert Palmer, *Sabbatum Redivivum* (London: Part I published in 1645 and Parts II-IV in 1652). See Bauckham, 323-26. Cf. Jean Porter, *Natural and Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 159-60.

[18] *Works*, 19: 329.

[19] *Works*, 19: 436.

[20] *Works*, 19: 426, 362-64. Elsewhere Owen argues that the resurrection provides strong evidence for believing the Lord's day properly points to the first day of the week, e.g., *Works*, 19: 409.

[21] *Works*, 21: 261-62.

[22] *Works*, 19: 356.

[23] *Works*, 19: 316. Interestingly, Owen's Continental contemporary Joshua le Vasseur also argues that, even if there were no fall, humanity would have had a specific time set aside for reflecting upon and worshiping God. See Joshua le Vasseur, *Thesaurus Disputationum Theologicarum in Alma Sednaenis Academia* (Geneva: 1661), 1066, as cited in Jochem Douma, *The Ten Commandments*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1996), 125.

[24] *Works*, 19: 324.

[25] *Works*, 19: 325.

similar point when he argues that the questions concerning the "separation of time" are secondary, since the "first object of this law or command is the worship of God."[26] Thus, on the Lord's day, humanity is encouraged to think primarily of communion with God which is enjoyed by entering into God's rest.[27] In this sense Owen falls within the general Puritan consensus: "The Sabbath was the great, regular red-letter day of the Puritan calendar, which looked both backward to the Creation and forward to the consummation of Creation in the eternal delight and rest of God's elect in heaven."[28] Yet, while Owen would be fairly comfortable with this generalization, he also adds something to it, namely a stronger Christological focus. Given this realization, how does Owen's Christology influence his position?

Christologically Transformed

Three points hold Owen's conception of a day of rest together: it is based in creation, Christologically transformed, and eschatologically informed. Having given attention thus far to the first point, we now focus on the latter two. Although viewing the day of sacred rest as a creation ordinance deeply informs Owen's belief that it should not simply be reduced to a shadow realized and done away with in Christ,[29] it is likewise impossible to understand his formulation apart from Christ. Owen argues that if the Lord of the Sabbath does not influence a theologian's view of the day of rest, he has problematically denied the risen Christ.[30] Relying on his covenantal theology, which holds together his conception of redemptive history, Owen affirms that the gospel has been the same from the beginning: "from first to last the gospel is, and ever was, the only way of coming unto God."[31] While a weekly day set apart specifically for corporate worship was part of the creation order, there were also "additions made unto it or limitation given of it" which served as shadows of Christ.[32] Both the rest attested to in the law of nature, as well as that rest instituted under the law of institutions, "were designed to represent the rest of the gospel."[33] Thus, the specific requirement of the seventh day and the role that day performed as a sign

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[26] *Works*, 19: 348-349.
[27] *Works*, 19: 354.
[28] Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, 6 vols., vol. II. From Andrewes to Baxter and Fox, 1603-1690 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 245.
[29] *Works*, 19: 379-84.
[30] *Works*, 19: 269, 393.
[31] *Works*, 21: 232, 239.
[32] *Works*, 19: 383. Cf. *Works*, 21: 304.

between God and ancient Israel under the old covenant, have been abolished in Christ.[34]

A brief explanation of Owen's view of rest under the "law of institutions" as distinct from being under the law of nature or under the gospel, may prove helpful.[35] From the beginning, the Sabbath pointed to God's pledge toward humanity: he would be their God and dwell with them, accepting their worship. After sin destroyed the original communion enjoyed between God and humanity under the law of nature, the "rest of Canaan" began to symbolize the rest possible under the law of institutions. During this period of redemptive history, God claims the land of Canaan will represent the land where he dwells and is worshiped, and consequently the people are invited to enter anew God's rest by following after him in faith and obedience. As a result, a distinct day of rest is instituted. Although the chronological location of the day-set-apart does not change from the last day of the week, with the law of institutions it is "re-established, upon new considerations and unto new ends and purposes."[36] It acted as "a token, sign, and pledge" of God's resting "in his instituted worship." In other words, believers were allowed to enter God's rest during this dispensation even though the Lamb of God had not yet come and offered himself as a sacrifice for sins. Worshipers were to hold onto the promises of God, observing in faith the institutions that embodied the promises pointing to the coming Messiah, waiting for their actualization in the future. Keeping the creation ordinance of a correct proportion of time – one in seven days – given specifically for the corporate worship of God, this day also signified *God's* rest, not under the law of nature, but under the law of institutions. Here again the people learned that "he was their God and that they were his people." Because of sin, the law of institutions follows the law of nature, but ultimately it was the gospel – even during this earlier period – which grounded the promise of rest for the people of faith.

According to Owen's reading, the relocation of the day from the end to the beginning of the week does not occur until Jesus' resurrection. Although Jesus observes the Sabbath throughout his earthly life,[37] as all things are renovated in

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[33] *Works*, 21: 275.
[34] *Works*, 19: 384.
[35] For this discussion, see *Works*, 21: 275-76. Cf. *Works*, 19: 413-16.
[36] *Works*, 21: 275. Cf. *Works*, 19: 402.
[37] *Works*, 19: 370.

Christ, the old Sabbath is no exception.[38] In Christ, "The old law, old covenant, old worship, old Sabbath, all that was peculiar unto the covenant of works as such, in the first institution of it [i.e., law of nature] and its renewed declaration on mount Sinai [i.e., law of institutions], are all antiquated and gone."[39] The old creation and covenant are fulfilled; the new creation renovates the image of God in humanity that was lost as a result of the fall; believers benefit from participating in the new covenant made, confirmed, and ratified in Christ.[40] Consequently, the chief cause of Christian obedience is Christ's authority and love, not the curse of the law.[41] Given that Owen believes that a day of rest can be argued from the New Testament based on Jesus' resurrection, it is appropriate to change not only the day, but also the name. Now it is best to speak, not of the Sabbath, but of the *Lord's* day: this expression rightly emphasizes "its relation unto our Lord Jesus Christ, the sole author and immediate object of all gospel worship."[42] So what does this rest in Christ mean? How does this rest in Christ tie creation, redemption, and the eschaton together?

Hebrews 4: Emphasizing the Already rather than the Not Yet

Arguably the best way to appreciate Owen's position at this point is by following his exegesis of Hebrews chapter 4, with specific attention on verse 10. This passage is particularly relevant because it is structured around the theme of a new Sabbath rest. From the very beginning, readers learn that Owen is going against the consensus on how to read elements of this passage. Of primary importance is his early disagreement with "expositors generally"; they interpret the rest spoken of in this passage as referring only to a future glory.[43]

Owen provides six reasons for his disagreement with this common reading. First, the principle of "rest" in Hebrews 4 cannot refer to eternal life, since the gospel

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[38] One must keep in mind, however, *Works*, 19: 404-05, where Owen does limit the meaning of 'renovation,' fearing that those who apply this to the Sabbath without qualification will lose the idea of a day of sacred rest.

[39] *Works*, 19: 404.

[40] *Works*, 19: 405-406. Cf. *Works*, 21: 280.

[41] *Works*, 19: 446.

[42] *Works*, 19: 286.

[43] *Works*, 21: 215. Owen does not list any names, but the clear consensus was that this rest was descriptive of believers experience in heaven. E.g., William Bates, *The Everlasting Rest of the Saints in Heaven* (London: repr. 1723) and Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest: or, A Treatise of the Blessed State of the Saints in Their Enjoyment of God in Glory*, 2 ed. (London: 1651) both build off of Hebrews 4.

is the same for both Old Testament believers and contemporary Christians: *all* who believe(d) will enter into eternal glory. Rather, this rest draws attention to what is "peculiar to the gospel and the times thereof," and therefore, this cannot be heaven.[44] Second, the author of Hebrews, whom Owen believes to be the apostle Paul,[45] proceeds in his argument by way of antithesis; the discussion contrasts Old Testament promise and New Testament fulfillment. Moses and Joshua pointed to the rest of Canaan, with Joshua even leading the people into the land where they could experience hints of church-state peace for the worship of God. But Jesus, as the true Joshua, leads believers into unlimited rest in himself.[46] Third, the intention of the author is for believers to enter this rest *now*, not simply in the future. Just as some of the people under Joshua entered into the land of rest during their lifetimes, so under Christ one may experience the present reality of rest. Fourth, Old Testament believers held onto the promises as "means" to enter into the promised rest, and these promises principally pointed to the person of Christ, not simply to the hope of eternity. Fifth, expositors have failed by not properly recognizing the realized aspect of the eschatology in this passage. The promise, which one is encouraged to enter into, must be interpreted as the preached gospel. Heaven is only part of the gospel promises, while the primary object of faith remains "Christ himself" and "the benefits of his mediation." [47] As such, rest in Christ is not for some future period, but presently experienced and enjoyed by believers. Finally, the design of this passage is *not* to argue that eternal life is greater than life under the law and the temporary rest experienced by the Israelites who entered Canaan, because none of the Hebrews doubted this obvious observation. Rather, the argument here is to show the "excellency of the gospel" as realized in Jesus Christ over and above "the privileges and advantages" which the Jews enjoyed under the Mosaic law.[48] In other words, the rest referred to throughout Hebrews 4 is "that rest which believers have an entrance into by Jesus Christ *in this world*."[49] Without understanding this point, any exposition of Hebrews will not only misunderstand chapter 4, but also will mishandle many other passages in the epistle.

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[44] *Works*, 21: 215.
[45] For his argument for Pauline authorship, see *Works*, 18: 65-92.
[46] *Works*, 21: 216.
[47] *Works*, 21: 217.
[48] *Works*, 21: 217.
[49] *Works*, 21: 217. Emphasis mine.

If the rest of Hebrews 4 is not a reference to heaven, what is it alluding to? Let us first mention some general observations which pertain to the entire chapter, and then conclude by observing Owen's particular exegesis of Hebrews 4:10, which adds an unexpected twist to the conclusions often associated with this verse.

This new rest signifies peace with God achieved through the blood of Christ. As such, believers need not wait for heaven to experience this reality, it is already accomplished: "justification, and peace with God thereon, are properly and directly ours."[50] Those who are found in Christ worship God in the present, not with the "spirit of servants," but in the spirit of sonship. Although Old Testament believers were sons, they were also infants unable to guide themselves, which means they differed very little from servants. But now, believers may fully enjoy the knowledge of their sonship; where the Spirit of Christ is, there is liberty to cry out to the Father, 'Abba.'[51] Since the yoke of the Mosaic law and institutions is broken, believers may fully rest in Christ rather than in the things which simply pointed to him. This rest is distinct as it calls believers to enter immediately into gospel worship and not to wait for glory. Owen's pnuematological emphasis causes him to see the Spirit as the means through which believers are now freed to worship God through the Son, and in the Spirit of Christ they find strength for every duty they face. Consequently, worship of God is not burdensome, but easy. As we will see below, this easiness may be misunderstood if not grasped Christologically. Consistent with his previously stated view, Owen finally asserts that this rest must first be understood as God's rest, which may be *entered into* by believers. "God resteth ultimately and absolutely, as to all the ends of his glory, in Christ, as exhibited in the gospel, –that is, he in whom his 'soul delighteth.'"[52] In his Son, God ultimately "rests in his love towards believers," and thus the worship of Christ is fully and finally what is required from people in this world. While in our concluding remarks on the Lord's supper we will discuss how God and humanity meet in the love of Christ, for now, it is sufficient to note that those who worship Christ enter into God's rest even in the present.

So how does this work out in his exegesis of Hebrews 4:10? It will help to read this verse in context in order to follow Owen's thought.

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[50] *Works*, 21: 218.
[51] *Works*, 21: 218-19. See also our discussion of adoption in chapter 5.
[52] *Works*, 21: 220.

> Heb. 4:8 For if Jesus [i.e., Joshua] had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.
> v. 9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.
> v. 10 For *he* that is *entered into his rest, he* also hath *ceased from his own works, as God did from his.*
> v. 11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (KJV, emphasis mine)

Most commentators, both then and now, read Heb. 4:10 as applying to believers and their entrance into God's rest.[53] However, Owen is not satisfied with this interpretation. His arguments are relevant for our study since they influence his formulation of how believers enjoy communion with God before glory.

Owen begins by asking questions of the text. Most significantly, what rest is intended for the person in v. 10? Some commentators argue that this verse refers to believers, having concluded this rest is from "sins," or from "their sorrows, and sufferings."[54] Problematically, the idea of rest is here contrasted with God's rest at creation (cf. Heb. 4:3-4, 10), wherein God "so rested from them as that *he rested in them*, and blessed them, and blessed and sanctified the time wherein they were finished."[55] In other words, the rest described here must be like God's rest at creation; this person does not find rest *from* his own evil deeds, but rather *rests in the good of God's finished labor.* Again, Owen asks, when do believers rest from their sins, sorrows, and labors? Given the realism that permeates his view of the continuous Christian struggle, Owen does not think believers can rest from temptation, sorrows, much less from the mortification of sin, prior to glorification.[56] This type of rest awaits them in heaven.

Here we may find a subtle attack on Calvin's influential handling of this passage. The Swiss Reformer argues that from Hebrews 4:10 believers' learn to "rest from our works."[57] To be fair, Calvin is arguing for a present experience of rest and goes on to connect the idea of resting from works with the practice of self-denial and

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[53] For Owen's handling of this verse see esp. *Works*, 21: 331-36 and 19: 417-21. Cf. William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, ed. Ralph P. Martin, vol. 47a, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 101-02.

[54] *Works*, 21: 332.

[55] *Works*, 21: 332. Emphasis mine.

[56] Cf. *Works*, 21: 323. For Owen's classic expositions on the ongoing struggle Christians have with sin, begin by reading his shorter treatises: *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers*, *Works* 6: 1-86; *Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It*, *Works* 6: 87-151; and *The Nature, Power, Deceit, and Prevalency of the Remainders of Indwelling Sin in Believers*, *Works*, 6: 153-322.

[57] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, trans. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1853), 98.

mortification. But since Calvin is committed to seeing the rest in verse 10 as applying to believers in general, he asserts that this rest "*cannot be attained in this life*, yet we ought ever to strive for it. Thus *believers* enter it but on this condition, – that by running they may continually go forward."[58] While Calvin presupposes the subject of the verse is believers, Owen wants to move from the general to the particular. Since Owen, like Calvin, believes the argument of the epistle refers not to heaven but to the rest "in and of the gospel," the rest in verse 10, which is "entered into" must, for Owen, refer to the present experience of *someone besides a believer.*

Owen's argument continues with the observation that, although Hebrews 4 has been using the plural (e.g., 'us' v. 1; 'we' vv. 2-3; 'people of God' v. 9), in verse 10 it suddenly jumps to the singular, "*He* that is entered" (ὁ εἰσελθὼν).[59] Believers in general cannot be referred to here, but rather a particular person. Not only this, but the rest itself is significantly described as "*his* rest." Whenever believers enter rest, it is never described as "their rest" or "our rest," but rather as "God's rest," "my [referring to God] rest," or "rest absolutely." As mentioned above, the foundation for human rest must always be God's rest, and so this verse – given Owen's theological presuppositions – cannot refer principally to a believer's rest. Again, there is a distinct parallel between the creation narrative and this passage, between the old and the new creation, but there is no comparison between God's works and the works of sinful humanity.[60] God is the author of both the old and new works of creation. These works of creation and building the church "must be *good* and *complete* in their kind and such as rest and refreshment may be taken in as well as upon. To compare the sins or the sufferings of men with the works of God, our apostle did not intend."[61]

The parallel between the old and new creation is illuminating. Forasmuch as God, at the foundation of the world, ceased from creating and took refreshment in his work, so also the Son ceases from his work of suffering – not facing death ever again – and delights with satisfaction in his works. "As our Lord Jesus Christ, as the eternal Son and Wisdom of the Father, was the immediate cause and author of the old creation. . . so as Mediator he was the author of this new creation."[62] This is not to say that, after the old or new creation, God ceases to care for and preserve his work

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[58] Calvin, *Hebrews*, 99. Emphasis mine.
[59] *Works*, 21: 333. Emphasis mine.
[60] *Works*, 19: 417.
[61] *Works*, 21: 333. Emphasis mine.
[62] *Works*, 19: 409.

and people in the Spirit, but it does affirm that these particular works of God are looked upon by God as being not only complete, but also good. Consequently, Owen argues the "he" must refer to Jesus. Joshua could not provide ultimate rest, and thus the people awaited another day and another person (Heb. 4:8-9). One must remember that every rest of God is preceded by his work.[63] Only Christ resting from his work in the incarnation can rightly be compared with God resting from his work at creation. While from the beginning the world observed a rest based on God's work of creation, now the Church may enter into God's rest based on the person and work of Christ.

This brings us to Owen's eschatological emphasis. What does Owen mean by speaking of Christ resting from his work, and when does this rest begin? Before one can understand how Christ rests, it is necessary to grasp Owen's definition of his works: "In brief, all that he [Jesus Christ] did and suffered, in and from his incarnation to his resurrection, as the mediator of the covenant, with all the fruits, effects, and consequences of what he so did and suffered, whereby the church was built and the new creation finished, belongs unto these works."[64] Although some might argue that Christ rests from his work either at his death or his ascension, Owen looks instead to the resurrection. On the one hand, death cannot be his rest, for Owen believed that "this separation of body and soul under the power of death was penal, a part of the sentence of the law which he underwent."[65] On the other hand, the ascension describes not Christ's rest, but his taking possession of glory, which he considers a different thing from rest.

Instead of these options, Owen believes that "in, by, and at his resurrection" Christ rest from his works. His reasons are fourfold: 1) at that moment, Jesus was freed from the power of death and the law, 2) all types, shadows, prophecies, etc. which relate to the work of redemption are here fulfilled, 3) his work of fulfilling the law, subduing Satan, making peace with God, paying the price for redemption, etc. were all finished, and 4) at that time he was declared to be the Son of God with power (Rom. 1:4, Acts. 13:33).[66] From this argument, Owen concludes that the author of the new creation enters into his rest on the first day of the week. Here we see the clear link between our background discussion of the Sabbath based in creation and its transformation as the Lord's day.

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[63] Cf. *Works*, 21: 278.
[64] *Works*, 19: 419.
[65] *Works*, 19: 420.

The consequences are clear: a new work of God has been completed, and *Christ* enters into his rest. Believers may enter into a spiritual rest which arises from the invitation to enter into God's rest. In this way, those in Christ are secure in the communion enjoyed by their head who has already ascended into the heavens as their forerunner.[67] Additionally, the first day of the week, which celebrates the resurrection of Christ, becomes the new day wherein the community of God should gather together for worship.[68] This community rests not *in* their own works, nor even *from* them, but rather *in the person and work of Christ.* Believers will continue to struggle in their experience of communion with God, but they gain assurance from the fact that the Son has entered into his rest, he has ceased from his work having accomplished the redemption of his people. Christians need not wait for heaven to know with confidence that God has entered the rest of his new work, and that he is satisfied with the work of the Son, rejoicing over it with singing. Believers found in Christ are thus appropriately invited to enter God's rest through communion with him. While living in a fallen world their struggles may remain, but given the resurrection of Jesus, they look forward expectantly for what is still to come, "full and eternal enjoyment" of communion with God in heaven.[69]

Only with this in mind can the idea of easiness, as mentioned above, be properly understood. Hebrews 4:11 moves back to the plural "us," calling believers to labor "to enter into that rest." But what is this labor? It is belief. "To know God in Christ is 'life eternal'. . . to believe, is to enter into the rest of God."[70] Again, this is not simply a future rest, but a present participation in the rest of Christ.[71] The day of sacred rest, which believers are called to enter into with faith and obedience, fosters human communion with God both in the present and in the future. This follows the pattern we have seen throughout Owen's theology. Divine action always precedes and gives a basis for human response. In Christ, God has entered his rest, and believers united to Christ are called to enter into *his* rest. Because of this, the Church considers this weekly event a celebration rather than a day for fasting and sadness.[72]

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[66] *Works*, 19: 420.

[67] Cf. Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1995), 156; Heppe, *RD*, 637.

[68] *Works*, 19: 410, 416.

[69] *Works*, 21: 325.

[70] *Works*, 21: 338. This is why Owen believes that unbelievers shall never enter into the rest of God, *Works*, 21: 204.

[71] *Works*, 21: 344.

[72] *Works*, 19: 459.

It is a day in which all are called to enter the communion with God for which they were originally created. All may enter into God's rest by faith in Christ, the forerunner who has completed his work, declared that it is good, and rested from and in it. On this day the Church celebrates renewed relations with God, looking forward expectantly to a time of "everlasting, uninterrupted, immediate communion with God [which] is heaven."[73]

The Lord's Supper

Not only does Owen understand the Lord's day as a divinely given opportunity for intimate communion between God and his people, he also believes the Lord's supper functions as a special ordinance in which communion between the divine and human may be enjoyed. Whereas the Lord's day is wrapped in the imagery of creation, the Lord's supper primarily points to redemption: both are united in their emphasis that these divine appointments may only be properly understood Christologically. By ending our study on the Lord's supper, a subject rarely discussed in reference to Owen's thought, we shall pay particular attention to why he believes there is a "peculiar communion" found therein. While baptism is the sacrament, according to Owen, of a person's new birth, the Lord's supper is about "our further growth in Christ" and thus is a repeated sacrament.[74] We find the supper of more immediate relevance to our discussion because of its consistent role in the life of the believer who is being renewed in the image of God. This ordinance must be celebrated until the "end of the world" because it serves as one crucial means by which Christ is present with his people until the consummation.[75] Here, in the ordinance, God and humanity meet in a most intimate way. To demonstrate this idea we shall concentrate on how Owen connects Christ's presence in the supper with the enjoyment of God's love and acceptance experienced therein. This final section relates to much that has been discussed in previous chapters, including the themes of faith, the humanity of Christ, justification, and the love of the triune God reshaping his people in his image.

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[73] *Works*, 19: 452.
[74] *Works*, 1: 491. *GC* XXIV, q. A, n. 3.
[75] See *Works*, 9: 571-75.

A Peculiar Communion

In the words of Owen, "peculiar communion" with Christ is obtained in the Lord's supper.[76] To many modern readers familiar with the high status given by the Puritans to the written and preached word, it may be surprising to discover the elevated position Owen gives to this sacrament. Without doubt he wholeheartedly affirms that God represents Christ through scripture as written and preached.[77] Yet, despite the growing tendency among late seventeenth century non-conformists to devalue the Lord's supper, Owen retains the belief that it has special significance.[78] The written and preached word are considered general representations of Christ, whereas, in the Lord's supper the particular is discovered.[79] At this point there is great similarity between Owen and his elder friend Thomas Goodwin.

Goodwin argues that the supper is the "most immediate and expressive" representation of Christ in comparison with the "word read or heard."[80] While these other ordinances point to Christ as the "author and deliverer" of some truth being considered, the Lord's supper focuses believers on the *person* of Christ. Using striking language, Goodwin makes his case for special immediacy clear: "The word preached is termed the word of Christ, Col. iii. and elsewhere, *but it is nowhere termed Christ*; no, nor is prayer or any other ordinance so named, but the rock was Christ, the bread is Christ, of which says, 'This is my body,' and of the wine, 'This is my blood;' yea, and it is Christ entire, whole Christ."[81] Notice the change in tense: whereas the rock *was* Christ, the bread *is* Christ, a move from past tense to the continuing present. Goodwin's overall reasoning in this section parallels Owen's thought on the immediacy enjoyed in this sacrament.

In one discourse given before administering the Lord's supper, Owen claims that there are two ways that Christ draws people to himself. Preaching serves as the

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[76] *Works*, 9: 523.

[77] *Works*, 9: 538-40.

[78] Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit*, 90-101, sees a logical connection between Puritan attitudes toward the sacraments and their eventual disuse by the Quakers; Stephen Mayor, *The Lord's Supper in Early English Dissent* (London: Epworth Press, 1972), traces the eventual decline in appreciation of the Lord's supper among non-conformists. See also Christopher J. Cocksworth, *Evangelical Eucharistic Thought in the Church of England* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), 54, 58-59; Horton Davies, *The Worship of the English Puritans*, reprint of 1948 ed. ed. (Morgan: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 204-16; Darwell Stone, *A History of the Doctrine of the Holy Eucharist*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (New York: Longmans, 1909), serves as a rare yet helpful resource, essentially offering selections from primary sources; Watkin-Jones, 243-55.

[79] *Works*, 9: 540.

[80] Thomas Goodwin, *Of Gospel Holiness in the Heart and Life*, in vol. 7, *Works of T. Goodwin*, 7: 312. Emphasis mine.

[81] Goodwin, *Of Gospel Holiness*, 7: 312.

first way by calling all sinners to repentance. The sacramental meal is the second way where believers are drawn "into actual communion with him" through their participation in this ordinance.[82] Owen places high value on the role of the supper in the experience of the Christian life; to lose this sacrament is to sacrifice much comfort and strength for the believer. Working from such a position, it should not be surprising that, in one of his catechisms, Owen advocates the supper as part of the weekly worship service, or "at least as often as opportunity and conveniency may be obtained."[83] He goes so far as to argue that "we have in no other ordinance" the same communion enjoyed with Christ as is found in the supper.[84] Through this great mystery a believer receives Christ by eating and drinking; this is something not done in prayer, the hearing of God's word, nor "in any other part of divine worship whatsoever."[85] Only by maintaining the link between faith, the elements, and God's movement, can this unique experience be fully appreciated.

The Presence of Christ

As we have already noted in earlier chapters, Owen believes that there is a tendency among Christians to move towards extremes. For example, when he wrote his treatise on the Holy Spirit, Owen self-consciously argued against the Socinian rationalists on the one side and the enthusiasts on the other.[86] Approaches to the Lord's supper similarly move between two polar opposites and, as a result of these extremes, a proper experience of communion with God is lost. Owen sees the two extremes as the medieval view of transubstantiation and the opposite view of empty symbolism.

Transubstantiation emerges, according to Owen, from a failure to uphold the role of faith in relation to the supper.[87] No other than the devil himself has used the

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[82] *Works*, 9: 595.
[83] *Works*, 15: 512. *SC* q. 40.
[84] *Works*, 9: 620.
[85] *Works*, 9: 620.
[86] See *Works*, volumes 3-4: *passim*.
[87] *Works*, 17: 597 [*BE*, 16: 529]. The Benedictine monk Paschasius Radbertus, writing in the ninth century, is commonly considered the first to clearly teach the position that later became known as transubstantiation. While opposed by the more Augustinian thinker Ratramnus, who argued for Christ's spiritual presence, Radbertus won the day, with transubstantiation later becoming the official Church dogma under Innocent III at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). See Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910; reprint, 1985), 4: §125-130; 5: §41, §115-116. The Council of Trent (1545-63) later expounds on the Church's more developed view of the

idea of transubstantiation to "overthrow" faith.[88] Reading history with this in mind, Owen believes that the error of seeing the carnal presence of Christ in the elements arises directly from those who have not enjoyed the "spiritual experience" through faith which gives rise to "sensible experience."[89] Those not having such legitimate experiences thought they could "do that with their mouths and teeth which they could not do with their souls."[90] With the loss of mystery comes the rise of transubstantiation.[91] This observation compels Owen to uphold some degree of mystery in his own references to the supper.[92]

For several commonly accepted reasons Owen rejects transubstantiation. These include his view that Rome's position cannot be reconciled with common sense and reason, much less with faith.[93] Turning to biblical evidence, Owen believes that the idea of Christ's corporeal presence in the bread and wine undermines the New Testament view of the Holy Spirit. Owen's pnuematology stresses that the third person of the Trinity is the Spirit of Christ and, as the Comforter, the Spirit only comes afresh with Christ's physical departure. Maintaining the presence of Christ's corporeal body on earth (in the elements) rather than in heaven is "inconsistent" with his reading of John 16:7, which tells of the Comforter who will come *after* Jesus' ascension. In a sarcastic aside, Owen muses that the promise of the Spirit cannot be reconciled to the idea that Jesus *must* return bodily as often as the priests call him.[94] Agreeing with the Reformed, who saw their position as protecting the true humanity of Jesus even after his resurrection, Owen believes that Christ is present through his Spirit, but not bodily present in the elements.[95] Here Owen also seeks to avoid the Eutychian temptation of maintaining that Christ's divine nature absorbed his human nature, a move he consistently rejects.

Supper (see sessions 13 and 22). For how English Protestant theologians respond to transubstantiation see Peter Newman Brooks, *Thomas Cranmer's Doctrine of the Eucharist: An Essay in Historical Development*, 2 ed. (London: Macmillan Academic, 1992), esp. 3-36; C. W. Dugmore, *Eucharistic Doctrine in England from Hooker to Waterland* (London: SPCK, 1942).

[88] *Works*, 9: 572.

[89] *Works*, 9: 591. Cf. *Works*, 9: 563.

[90] *Works*, 9: 591.

[91] *Works*, 9: 563.

[92] E.g., *Works*, 9: 540, 583, 620, 621, etc.

[93] See *Works*, 9: 572. Cf. Zwingli's similar link with "the reason of faith," W. P. Stephens, *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 244.

[94] *Works*, 9: 572.

[95] Wilhelm Niesel, *Reformed Symbolics: A Comparison of Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism*, trans. David Lewis (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 273-74.

On the other hand, these "adversaries" (i.e., Roman theologians) charge their Protestant opponents with falling into mere symbolism, a charge Owen believes he escapes. The argument against Protestants like Owen was that, by rejecting transubstantiation, they failed to maintain any real difference between the communion with Christ in the preached word and that experienced in the supper. It was argued that unless one affirms a "real presence," – by which is meant a "real substantial transmutation of the elements into the substance of the body and blood of Christ" – there is nothing special about this ordinance.[96] In response, Owen argues that there is a peculiar communion with Christ in the Lord's supper; by faith, there is more in this ordinance than merely bread and wine, yet, there is less than the carnal flesh and blood of Christ. Therefore, while Christ is present in the supper, this reality cannot be understood in a corporeal manner.

Having rejected transubstantiation, Owen also refuses to see the supper as 'naked' symbolism. Although Zwingli's reconsideration of the Lord's supper, with its stress on faith, symbolism, and thanksgiving, had a widespread impact upon many thinkers who followed, it was common among Reformed theologians to adopt a more mediated position, as often attributed to Calvin. One sees this supposed mediated view most clearly demonstrated in the Reformed Confessions from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[97] While not entering the continuing debate about how best to understand the particularities of Zwingli's and Calvin's views of the supper,[98] we must admit a strong desire among later Reformed thinkers to stress the real or true presence of Christ in the sacrament, and not simply their opposition to transubstantiation. B. A. Gerrish, muddying the waters a bit, argues that there are actually three doctrines of the Eucharist found in Reformed confessions: *symbolic*

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[96] *Works*, 9: 622. Cf. *Council of Trent*, 72-76.

[97] Jan Rohls argues along these lines in *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*, trans. John Hoffmeyer, *Columbia Series in Reformed Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 177-88, 219-37.

[98] Whether Owen's own views more closely resemble Zwingli, Calvin, or for that matter Bucer, would greatly depend upon one's reading of these Reformers, and no final voice has settled the heated debates. For one of the fairest treatments of Zwingli that takes into account how his thought develops, see Stephens, *Zwingli*, 218-59; on Bucer see W. P. Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer* (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), 245-50. Calvin remains the most disputed figure, being characterized as everything from a "crypto-catholic" to a "subtle sacramentarian," B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 2-9. Besides the recent study of Gerrish, see also Wallace, *Word and Sacrament*, 133-74, 197-233. For those interested in seeing how Luther fits into this discussion see Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body:*

memorialism (cf. Zwingli), *symbolic parallelism* (cf. Bullinger), and *symbolic instrumentalism* (cf. Calvin).[99] The difficulty is that these positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and the shared language used by all only adds to the confusion. This is clearly seen, for example, in the difference between how Zwingli and Calvin understand symbolism: "For Zwingli symbolism is what enables him to use realistic language without meaning it realistically. For Calvin symbolism is what assures him that he receives the body of Christ without believing in a localized presence of the Body in the elements."[100] Such enduring ambiguity may explain the danger in trying to categorize Owen in a particular Eucharistic camp, and therefore, we will resist the temptation of reductionism in our study.

Although Owen may often avoid the particulars of his own position, instead resorting to general and commonly accepted categories, he is positive that all should reject a view that constructs the elements as "a naked figure" or "bare" representation. As he explains, "there is something in the figure, something in the representation; but there is not all in it."[101] While upholding God's omnipresence, Owen also argues for a special divine presence in the ordinances.[102] Pagan idolatry used images ultimately to represent an *absent* God, but in scripture one finds ordinances where believers uniquely encountered their *present* God.

Seeing that God is not absent from anywhere in his world, he nevertheless has chosen to show his presence in extraordinary ways at particular times. In the Old Testament, one may think of numerous examples, such as the burning bush in which God's appearance is clear and intense. Even so, Owen muses, sheep freely fed upon the same ground on the following day. Here one may note an indirect attack on Rome's view of the "permanence of Christ's eucharistic presence."[103] The principle Owen employs is that God may choose to make a specific space and time the locality of his special presence, but that it is holy only as long as "God's appearance made it

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Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959).

[99] B. A. Gerrish, "The Lord's Supper in the Reformed Confessions," *TT* 23 (1966): 224-43.

[100] Gerrish, "Lord's Supper," 231. He adds that for Calvin, "because sacraments are divinely appointed signs, and God does not lie, therefore the Spirit uses them to confer what they symbolize."

[101] *Works*, 9: 563. Cf. *Works*, 17: 597 [*BE*, 16: 529]: "There is, indeed, a figure or representation in this ordinance; but that is not all."

[102] *Works*, 9: 548.

[103] Niesel, 105.

so."[104] Similar examples include the tabernacle and the temple. In these, God's presence was instituted by no other than God himself. Wherever God may appear, there is his special presence. As these Old Testament revelations pass away with the coming of Christ, Owen knows many have declared that Christ's special presence is no longer found in any ordinance. He flatly rejects such a position. Although his congregation may claim that it was easier for Old Testament saints to go to a designated place and expect God's presence (e.g., the temple), in fact, Owen thinks the case is no different for the faithful living in the present. He emphatically proclaims, "it is no harder matter for us to go and expect God's presence in his instituted ordinances now than for them to go to the temple; considering [that] God, as the object of our worship, is no less present with us."[105] God uniquely meets with his people and blesses them through his presence in the ordinances – this has always been a characteristic of God's dealing with humanity.

While in the above context Owen often uses the plural to refer to the ordinances in general, most of the time he places particular emphasis on the Lord's supper as manifesting Christ's special presence. There is, and must be, something real communicated in the supper, and here Owen affirms the vital role of faith and sacramental union.

> If there was no more in this ordinance exhibited but only the outward elements, and not, by virtue of sacramental relation upon God's institution, the body and blood of Christ, his life, and death, and merits, exhibited unto us, we should come to the Lord's table like men in a dream, eating and drinking and be quite empty when we have done; for this bread and wine will not satisfy our souls.[106]

Believers are called to eat and drink the body and blood of Christ and, unless in doing so they enjoy a "real communication," their actions are empty.[107] Through faith, believers see the connection between the signs and the things signified in the sacramental relationship.[108]

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[104] *Works*, 9: 549.

[105] *Works*, 9: 549.

[106] *Works*, 9: 617. This serves as an excellent example of how Owen's language is saturated with biblical imagery, even when – as is the case here – he does not directly cite a biblical reference. His imagery clearly comes from Isaiah 29:8.

[107] *Works*, 9: 617. Cf. Rohls, 237.

[108] This union, according to Owen's continental contemporary Petrus Van Mastricht (1630-1706), is not corporeal, nor imaginary, nor strictly spiritual, but "sacramental," by which "although the thing signified is not contained in the sign or, much less, is the sign by nature; but in virtue of the divine institution and promise there is such a moral nexus between thing and thing signified, that he who accepts the signs in the way appropriate to the divine institution, at the same time receives the thing signified," cited in Heppe, *RD*, 598.

Not only is Christ's death set before the worshiper in the supper, it is also "an holy action" which "communicate[s] unto us spiritually his body and blood by faith."[109] Yet again, Owen attempts to hold together divine action and human response: in this sacrament God's act is primarily to exhibit Christ to his people, and their primary act is to receive him by faith.[110] Without faith the supper does not benefit the receiver, but with faith, Christ is made present in this sacrament. E. Brooks Holifield, when discussing the misconception that Independents must inevitably be associated with 'antisacramental spiritualism,' turns to Owen as a positive example. Though it may surprise many, Holifield claims that "Owen stressed even more than Calvin himself the uniqueness of the sacramental presence."[111] Certainly Holifield is correct in so far as Owen does argue for a communion with Christ that is "special and peculiar" to the supper. Faith sees in the supper the death of Christ, and it causes what is past to be "present to the soul. It is to realize it and bring it before us. It is not a bare remembrance of it, but such a one as makes it present."[112] Owen goes on to claim that, by faith, participation in the supper brings the same advantage "as there would have been if we had stood by the cross."[113] One is taken to the heart of Owen's view of the supper by this image. To stand at the foot of the cross is not to eat Christ's physical body and blood, but to stand in the actuality of God's gracious presence. In his mind, Christ hanging on the cross is not primarily a gruesome picture, but rather the most colorful and rich tapestry of God's love. Bread and wine represent the person of Christ who, having wholly identified with humanity, gave himself up as a sacrifice. Thus, in the person of Christ hanging on the cross, one encounters the depth of God's love and acceptance.

God's Love and Acceptance

Several categories are employed by Owen to describe the Lord's supper. Most commonly found are the following descriptions: commemorative, profession,

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[109] *Works*, 1: 491. *GC* XXIV.1.

[110] *Works*, 17: 599 [*BE*, 16: 531]

[111] E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720* (New Haven: Yale, 1974), 131. Cf. C. E. Whiting, *Studies in English Puritanism from the Restoration to the Revolution, 1660-1688* (New York: 1931), 75-81.

[112] *Works*, 17: 596 [*BE*, 16: 528]

Eucharistic, federal, exhibition, and incorporation.[114] Owen often overlaps these categories and rarely uses all of this language in any one setting. Nevertheless, through these various categories and diverse language, Owen weaves together a fairly consistent presentation. He consistently stresses God's love in Christ who alone provides restored fellowship with God. By participating in the supper, believers are incorporated into Christ; they are united to him by the power of the Holy Spirit, and consequently nourished by their renewed experience and remembrance of God's abiding love for those who are found in the Son.

As we have seen throughout his writings, when Owen wants to stress God's love he often begins by reminding his audience that cosmic reconciliation is needed. Employing Aristotelian categories, Owen sees the procuring cause of Christ's death as human sinfulness – without sin there would be no need for Christ's suffering.[115] Although in Christ believers enjoy the forgiveness of sins, this reality should not cause them to move beyond the overwhelming nature of the gospel message as remembered in the supper. Therefore, one way to prepare for the supper is by gaining a "deep sense of the infinite distance that is between God and us," not in order to keep believers away, but simply to remember this as they go "to meet" with their God. Explaining further he adds: "Nothing brings God and man so near together as a due sense of our infinite distance."[116] By beginning with this realization, worshipers are enabled to respond with gratitude whenever they celebrate the way in which this distance was overcome. Here again the role of faith is vital, for it allows "us to sit down at God's table as those that are the Lord's friends, –as those that are invited to feast upon the sacrifice . . . God makes a feast upon it, and invites his friends to sit down at his table, there being now *no difference between him and us.*"[117] Notice that believers are invited to the table for a feast, not to an altar for a sacrifice. There are no further sacrifices, nothing for those in Christ to fear. Christ, as seen in the Lord's supper, "hath perfectly made an end of all differences between God and us,"

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[113] *Works*, 17: 596 [*BE*, 16: 528]. This imagery is similar to Zwingli's who argues that "everything Christ did in the flesh becomes as if (verlut) present to them," Gerrish, "Lord's Supper," 227.

[114] E.g., *Works*, 595-96, 527-28, 530, 538 ff., 572 ff., etc.

[115] *Works*, 9: 526, 579.

[116] *Works*, 9: 551-552. Cf. "It is required that [the theologian or minister] weigh every thing he asserts in his own mind and experience, and not dare to propose that unto others which he doth not abide by himself, in the most intimate recesses of his mind, under his nearest approaches unto God... and [his] humble contemplations of the *infinite distance between God and him*," *Works*, 5: 4. Emphasis mine. See also *Works*, 24: 40-41.

embodying the grace found "in the heart of God."[118] Elsewhere Owen also describes Christ who erects "a spiritual house," which is his church, "wherein he makes provision for the entertainment of those guests whom he so freely invites."[119] Yet, what is distinctly enjoyed by those who enter this house is the ability to eat of the bread and wine "so graciously prepared," and by doing so they enjoy a special fellowship with God: "for in what ways or things is there nearer communion than in such?"[120]

With this background, Stephen Mayor's claim that Owen does not have a significant place for thanksgiving and joy in the Lord's supper cannot be upheld.[121] Owen consistently upholds the Eucharistic nature of the supper, but not in reference to Christ's resurrection – as he does in his view of the Lord's day – but rather in view of Christ's atoning work on the cross.[122] Christ's suffering and believers' thanksgiving are intimately connected, for without the former the latter proves impossible.[123] The incarnate Lord approached his suffering with joy because of his love toward those for whom he endured the pain.[124] Thus, to remember and show forth Christ's death in the supper *is celebration*, for by participating in the meal, believers "profess and plead our interest therein" and receive the benefits from Christ's work.[125]

At this point, we see Owen's belief that the supper uniquely highlights the particularity of the gospel. The promises of the gospel "indefinitely" go out to all who will believe, but the supper moves from the universal to the particular. In the supper, "by God's institution, Christ is tendered and given to me and to thee, – to every one in particular; for it is by his institution that the elements in this ordinance are distributed to every particular person, to show that there is a tender and communication of Christ to particular persons."[126] In other words, whereas in preaching, the word goes out generally to all who will hear, the supper makes the general more particular. In this sense, the Protestant scholastics speak of the "visible

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[117] *Works*, 9: 566. Emphasis mine.
[118] *Works*, 9: 565.
[119] *Works*, 2: 46.
[120] *Works*, 2: 46.
[121] Mayor, *Early English Dissent*, 121; idem, "The Teaching of John Owen," 180-81.
[122] E.g., *Works*, 9: 528, 537, 544, 589, 612, *Works*, 17: 596 [*BE*, 16: 528].
[123] *Works*, 9: 569.
[124] *Works*, 9: 577.
[125] *Works*, 9: 579. Cf. *Works*, 1: 469, 492. *GC* XXIV.6.
[126] *Works*, 9: 600-01.

word," which applies only to Christians who may benefit from the sacraments.[127] "Now every one knows, that whatever feasts be prepared in the world, unless every one in particular takes his own portion, and eats and digests it, it will not turn to nourishment unto him."[128] This faith fixes itself on the particularity of Christ's love for the individual: "Christ had a special love, not only to the church in general, but the truth is, Christ had a special love for me in particular."[129] What baffles Owen is that he can see nothing in any believer, including himself, that would make Christ love them, and yet, Christ does. Here we find Owen's expression of the Reformers idea of *pro nobis*: God's particular love meant that Christ gave himself "for us."[130] In other words, while the other means by which the gospel goes out tend to emphasize the universal, in this one ordinance the particular becomes most immediate. Functionally this particularity is not envisioned as a means of promoting pride and intolerance of others, but rather, of inspiring wonder at the undeserved grace bestowed upon individual sinners.

Central to Owen's entire conception of the Lord's supper is his view of God's love. As noted above, the clearest manifestation of God's love is discovered in looking to Christ, and more particularly, to Christ crucified. This was the great sacrifice that was only possible because of the love of the triune God. Whereas the procuring cause of the atonement is sin, the moving cause is God's eternal love.[131] And this love cannot be appreciated apart from a Trinitarian framework. Here we find another example of Owen's insistence that the doctrine of the Trinity must be understood within the context of worship, and the supper is no exception to this.

In a brief discourse on Matthew 3:17 given before the institution of the Lord's supper, [132] Owen makes the connection between God's inter-Trinitarian love and his love for people. Preached in 1676, only six years before his death, these thoughts

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[127] Heppe, *RD* : "The word proclaims salvation to all who hear it, the sacrament appropriates it only to believers. The word is meant to arouse faith in itself, the sacrament is meant to fortify faith in the word," 595 and cf. 601-04, 650-54. Cf. the Reformed Thomistic approach of Peter Martyr who influences the direction of sacramental theology as it develops in England, Joseph C. McLelland, *The Visible Words of God: An Exposition of the Sacramental Theology of Peter Martyr Vermigli* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957).

[128] *Works*, 9: 601.

[129] *Works*, 9: 601.

[130] *Works*, 9: 602.

[131] *Works*, 9: 525.

[132] I.e., 'this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased...'

reflect Owen's mature thinking on the subject.[133] The logic is as follows: in the Lord's supper, believers are called principally to think of Christ's death, and thinking of his death makes them remember his love, and reflecting on Christ's love leads one back to the fullest expression of love as found in the Trinity. Only the person of Christ may be the "first complete object of the love of God the Father." Here Owen moves into a brief and rare comment regarding the immanent Trinity: "A great part . . . of the essential blessedness of the holy Trinity consists in the mutual love of the Father and the Son, by the Holy Ghost; which is the love of them both."[134] Having made this claim, Owen believes that it is the Son's divine nature alone which provides the "full, resting, complete object of the love of God the Father."[135] From eternity, this was the delight of the Father, and so Owen deduces, this was antecedent to the incarnation. From eternity the Son was begotten of the Father, for he comes from the bosom of the Father. God's love, therefore, cannot be rightly understood without seeing it as, first and foremost, an inter-Trinitarian love wherein "every thing else of love is but a free act of the will of God, – a free emanation from this eternal love between the Father and the Son." Then Owen adds, "God never did any thing without himself, but the end of it was to manifest what is in himself."[136] Through his old and new creation God's own power, wisdom, grace, and love are made known. *All* love experienced and seen in this world is but a reflection or shadow of *inter-Trinitarian* love.[137] People throughout the ages have contemplated both the idea and manifestations of love, but found it impossible to locate the source of that love; Owen sees the origin in that "God necessarily loved himself."[138]

Next, Owen moves from immanent to economic Trinitarian action, and in so doing, he makes the necessary link to the Lord's supper. For while this first love of God reflects inter-Trinitarian love among the divine persons and is what "we call *ad intra*," Owen makes the profound jump to God the Father's first act of love "*ad extra*." This first loving action *ad extra* of God is focused on "the person of Christ

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[133] For this short discourse, see *Works*, 9: 612-615.

[134] *Works*, 9: 613.

[135] *Works*, 9: 613.

[136] *Works*, 9: 613.

[137] *Works*, 9: 613: "The sole reason why there is such a thing as love in the world among the creatures, angels or men, – that God ever implanted it in the nature of rational creatures,–was, that it might shadow and represent the ineffable, eternal love that the Father had unto the Son, and the Son unto the Father, by the Spirit."

[138] *Works*, 9: 613. "God's loving of himself absolutely as God, is nothing but his eternal blessed acquiescence in the holy, self-sufficing properties of his nature," 9: 613-14.

considered as invested with our nature."[139] The humanity first loved by God is the human nature assumed by the Son, for in this union of the divine and human in the person of Christ God finds great pleasure. Without such love expressed in this union there could be no "communication of love unto us."[140] Drawing from a series of divine declarations throughout the New Testament, Owen hears a consistent refrain: whether looking at Jesus' baptism, his personal testimony about the Father, or the transfiguration, all of these provide clear statements of the Father's distinct pleasure, delight, and particular love for his Son. Here Owen puts words into God's mouth, envisioning him saying: "Let the sons of men (I speak it from heaven again and again) take notice of this, that the infinite love of my whole soul is fixed on the person of Jesus Christ *as incarnate.*"[141] Without this Christological connection, Owen can see no way for fallen human beings to be recipients of God's love. Thus, crucial to the believer's response in the supper is Christ's person as the object of faith, with Owen drawing particular attention to Christ's humanity.[142]

Looking afresh at Owen's conception of the *imago Dei*, we are taken back to the beginning of our study of relations between God and humanity. Here Owen makes the final connection: *to be renovated into the image of God is directly related to one's love for Christ,* clearly a *relational* emphasis. "Proportional to the renovation of the image and likeness of God upon any of our souls, is our love to Jesus Christ. He that knows Jesus Christ most, is most like unto God; for there the soul of God rests, –there is the complacency of God."[143] The person who seeks renewal in God's image must "exercise" his love for Christ. Quoting Owen at length provides an opportunity, not simply to follow his logic, but to hear the rhythms of his anthroposensitive movement:

> And pray let me observe it to you, the world, that is full of enmity to God, doth not exercise its enmity against God immediately under the first notion of God, but exerciseth its enmity against God in Christ: and if we return to God

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[139] *Works*, 9: 614.

[140] *Works*, 9: 614. He adds, "From the first eternal love of God proceeds all love that was in the first creation; and from this second love of God, to the person of Christ as incarnate, proceeds all the love in the second creation."

[141] *Works*, 9: 614-15. Emphasis mine. He later adds: "The great satisfaction of the soul of God, wherein he rests and delights, consists in love to Christ as incarnate."

[142] E.g., *Works*, 8: 560; 9: 522, 524, 560, 586 ff., 590, 595, etc. Cf. Calvin's emphasis on participation in Christ's humanity, John Calvin, "Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper," in *Calvin's Tracts and Treatises*, ed. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint 1958), 170-72 reprinted in *RR*, 317.

[143] *Works*, 9: 615.

> by the renovation of his image, we do not exercise our love to God immediately as God, but our love to God by and in Christ. . . . .
>
> Here is a trial, brethren, of our return to God, and of the renovation of his image in us, – namely, in *our love to Jesus Christ. There God and man do meet*, – there God and his church above and below centre. The Lord grant that this ordinance may be the means to stir up our hearts more to the exercise of this grace![144]

Christ as the Mediator proves to be the essential person in determining the state of one's relations with God: to love Christ is to love God, to oppose Christ is to oppose God. For Christ is the one "adequate, complete object of the love of God, and of the whole creation that bears the image of God." [145] In the supper, the believing participant is reminded of God's love in Christ, and is invited to participate in God's love for his Son. By faith, the reception of the supper consistently and visually displays God's redemptive action in Christ. In Christ alone, "God and man meet," and therefore, relations between the divine and human must remain in Christ. To love Christ is to love God, and to be loved by Christ is to be loved by God. As our entire study has shown, *to be fully human as originally created is to be in relationship with God, and that relationship must be centered upon Christ, where God and humanity meet.*

Conclusion

In this chapter we have observed how Owen employs the Lord's day and the Lord's supper as signs of continuing communion with God. The Lord's day not only points back to the original goodness of creation wherein humanity enjoyed fellowship with God, but also to the new creation discovered in the person and work of Christ. In Christ alone is fallen humanity able once again to enter into God's rest and delight, for 'in, by, and at' the resurrection *Christ* rests from his work. Emphasizing what has been accomplished in Christ, Owen stresses the realized eschatological principles behind the idea of rest. Believers enjoy the 'gospel' in the present, knowing that the future holds out promise of perfect communion. Although believers still struggle with sin prior to glorification, they are invited by faith to enter into Christ's rest, since he has secured their 'full and eternal enjoyment of God' which is fully actualized in the uninterrupted communion with God experienced in heaven.

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[144] *Works*, 9: 615. Emphasis mine.
[145] *Works*, 9: 612-13.

Similarly, believers are encouraged by the promise of a 'peculiar communion' with Christ obtained in the Lord's supper. The supper is neither naked symbolism nor the actual flesh and blood of Christ. Rather, in the supper believers enjoy the special presence of God, since throughout redemptive history God has revealed his willingness to meet with his people and to bless them in the ordinances. Again, while divine action is given primacy in this 'holy action' as Christ is exhibited, there is still a call for human response through faith. In the supper believers are reminded not simply of God's general love, but of his particular love for them. Love is pivotal to Owen's whole conception of the supper, and by implication, to his whole conception of human communion with God. As we discovered in Owen's mature reflections on the subject, the clearest display of a person's renewal into the image of God is seen in their response to Christ. The triune God's love is embodied in the Son who was sent by the Father and empowered by the Spirit. *In the love of Christ God and humanity meet: in Christ God and humanity commune.* This is what best defines being made in God's image. Here we conclude by observing how, for Owen, anthropology only makes sense when placed within the framework of relations with God.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This brings us to the end of our investigation in which we have outlined John Owen's conception of human communion with God, arguing that his anthropology is best understood by placing it within a framework of relations between God and humanity. What we have discovered is a Puritan approach that seeks to emphasize a holistic understanding of human existence and a Trinitarian sensibility grounded in an incarnational theology, held together by an experiential concern for the believer. Scholars have been divided in their reading of Owen: some argue that he has an anthropocentric theology while others describe it as theocentric. Our contention has been that while Owen is rightly labeled theocentric, this must not be understood as a denial of his heavy emphasis on practical anthropological concerns. Throughout our study, we have seen that Owen is best described as presenting an anthroposensitive theology: he seeks to avoid divorcing his theological considerations from practical human applications, since theological reflections are always interwoven with anthropological concerns. This is achieved primarily through his acknowledgement that fallen humanity's lack of communion with God can only be answered with a consistent Christological focus built upon a Trinitarian framework. Whether he is discussing the Son's assumption of a human nature, how to approach the topic of justification, or most significantly the triune God, Owen's anthropological observations of human communion with God are always present.

It may be helpful to conclude with a brief review of what we have covered. In order to appreciate this Puritan's enduring importance, chapter one provided a much-needed overview of the growing collection of academic literature on John Owen. Here we discovered some neglected resources while also demonstrating the increasing interest in, and potential renewed influence of, this Puritan theologian. Through this overview, it became clear that a study of Owen's anthropology as understood in light of his conception of communion with God was not only needed, but could also prove illuminating for future studies of other aspects of Owen's theology.

Chapter two moved into an examination of the primary sources, beginning with a description of Owen's formulation of the *imago Dei*. Here we analyzed numerous topics, giving detailed attention to his employment of faculty psychological language. Through this analysis we found that – contrary to common assumptions – Owen is not a blind follower of Aristotelian philosophy. In the example of faculty psychology alone, we discovered a theologian's attempt to employ the categories of his day in order to present a holistic conception of being human. This included giving due attention to the mind, will, affections, and even the body. Having this background helped as we discovered again and again in later chapters how Owen calls humanity to respond to God holistically while at the same time acknowledging sin's effects upon every faculty. Accordingly, one cannot understand Owen's conception of communion with God apart from his conception of human faculties, since intimate fellowship with God does not require people to go beyond or against how they were originally designed. Even believers, who are renewed in Christ and thus free from a state of 'confusion,' nevertheless wrestle with sin as expressed in 'rebellion,' a situation only fully escaped in glory when all their faculties, and thus their disposition, is perfectly directed to the glory of Christ.

Given the realities of the fall and the shattered image, in chapter three we examined Owen's conception of the incarnation, paying special attention to the humanity of Christ, again a neglected subject in Owen studies. Here we discussed Owen's reasons for why the incarnation was essential for restored communion between God and humanity. We spent considerable time examining Owen's understanding of the Son's assumption of a human nature, since this is pivotal for how humanity may be renewed to right relations with God. Although the idea of 'the assumption' may be a topic some relegate to scholarly debate, as an illustration of Owen's anthroposensitivity we discussed his attempt to preach this doctrine in order to provide comfort to his listeners. Finally, we examined Owen's conception of the continuity and discontinuity between Jesus and the rest of humanity. According to Owen, the believer must recognize Jesus as truly human, like the rest of humanity in all ways, yet without sin. In this unique way, Jesus proves to be the second Adam who is victorious where the first Adam failed. This means that the person of Christ, who is truly God and truly man, secures the only path to renewed relations with God.

From there we proceeded in chapter four to Owen's exposition of the doctrine of justification, wherein he seeks to hold together God's redemptive action and human

response. Here we discovered the tension of Owen's anthroposensitivity: his concern is not simply the justice of God, but rather, how the God who is just provides justification in Christ. Having already looked at divine action most clearly demonstrated in the incarnation, we paid special attention to the human response of faith. This necessarily drove us back to a discussion of the *person* of Christ who is uniquely the object of faith and who, as the high priest, delivers his people from their sin. In order to appreciate the significance of Owen's emphasis on human response rather than initiative, we described Owen's rejection of 'double justification,' noting his fear that such a conception undermines the complete redemption found in the person and work of Christ. Finally, we ended this chapter by highlighting the positive role of imputation understood in light of personal union with Christ: a believer's sins are imputed to Christ 'for a season' so that he might do away with them on the cross; those united to Christ not only have their sins taken away, but they also receive 'the right and title unto eternal life.' Throughout this chapter we acknowledged both the objective and subjective sides of justification as discussed in Owen's work. Humanity is called to *respond* in faith to God who displays his loving plan of redemption in Christ, the unique *theanthropos*.

Chapter five provided an extended analysis of Owen's conception of the Christian experience of communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Since Owen's book *Of Communion* has received insufficient attention, we outlined in detail Owen's contribution to Trinitarian theology. Yet again we found that Owen refuses to divorce theological reflection from anthropological implications, and thus, with every observation made about the distinct divine persons, Owen describes how this should inform a person's response to God. In other words, Owen squarely places his discussion of Trinitarian theology in the context of worship. We discussed Owen's conception for how believers may worship God distinctly as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, recognizing that when 'we are led to worship . . . any person, we do herein worship the whole Trinity; and every person.' Thus he is free to describe distinct communion with the divine persons, while preserving the unity of the triune God. Because Owen sees that many believers fear the Father, he argues that the love of the Father is the fountain from which the waters of redemption flow. One need not think that Christ loves them while the Father is angry. Since the Father is the one who is 'the lover of humanity,' he sends his Son to redeem the lost. Yet the Father's love is most clearly seen in the Son. By realizing the affections of the Son for God's people,

including delight, valuation, pity and compassion, and bounteous love toward them, believers will become secure in God's acceptance and their adoption into his family. These truths are meant to free believers to enjoy intimate communion with God, as a wife with her husband. Finally, Owen describes the person and work of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity. As a divine person, the Spirit of Christ comes to believers bringing comfort and grace. Owen explores tests by which believers may differentiate the Spirit of Christ from false spirits, in order to promote communion with the true God. Against the Enthusiasts, we saw Owen arguing that the faculties are not to be overcome or ignored, but rather they provide the accepted means by which God may be worshiped.

Finally, in chapter six we looked at how Owen understands the Lord's day and the Lord's supper. We discovered that these signs serve as significant means through which believers are consistently brought back to the love of God in Christ. Through a Sabbath, all of humanity is reminded of the original creation wherein unmitigated communion with God was enjoyed. Now believers find in the Lord's day a continual reminder of the new creation found in Christ who has completed his work and entered into his rest, inviting all through faith to enter into his finished work. Functioning with even more immediacy, the Lord's supper provides nourishment for believers as they see afresh the triune God's love manifested in the given Christ. In the person of Christ, God and humanity meet in love, and the Lord's supper grounds this potentially abstract idea in a concrete reality. The point is clear for both the sacred day and sacred supper: this is a God who loves to commune with his people and, as such, he has provided complete redemption through his Son. According to Owen, renewed humanity are those people who most clearly reflect the image and likeness of God. For as the Father unreservedly loves Christ, so believers reflect their God more and more as they grow in love for their Savior, enjoying in him the communion for which they were created.

It is perhaps fitting to close with an extract from Owen's tombstone located in evocative Bunhill Fields, London.

> And, having set aside other pursuits, he cultivated and experienced the blessed communion with God of which he wrote. In this world he was a pilgrim who drew very near to grasping the full glory of heaven.[1]

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[1] "Et, missis Caeteris, Coluit ipse, Sensitque, Beatam quam scripsit, cum Deo Communionem, in terris Viator comprehensori in caelis proximus." Toon, *God's Statesman*, 182-83, provides the Latin epitaph by Thomas Gilbert, along with his own English translation.

Appendix: Comparing Westminster and John Owen's Catechisms on Humanity (including Jesus')[1]

WCF	WLC	WSC	Owen's Greater Catechism
ch. 5. 2 on Creation: God "created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image…"	Q. 17 on creation of man[2]: "God created man male and female; formed the body of the man of the dust of the ground… endued them with living, reasonable, and immortal souls…"	Q. 10 on God creating man: "male and female, after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, with dominion over the creatures."	ch. 5: 4: man was originally able to worship and serve God "to the uppermost, being created upright in the image of God, in purity, innocency, righteousness, and holiness."
ch. 6.2 on the Fall: humanity became "wholly defiled in all the *faculties* and *parts of soul and body*."	Q. 28 on punishments of sin: they are "either inward, as blindness of *mind*, a reprobate sense, strong delusions, hardness of heart, horror of conscience, and vile *affections*; or outward, … [which includes] all other evils that befall us in our *bodies*, names, estates, relations, and employments; together with death itself."	Q. 18 on man's estate after the fall: man suffered "the corruption of his *whole nature*, which is commonly called Original Sin."	ch. 8.2 on the effects of the fall: his list includes the idea that "our *souls* with [Adam's fall] were deprived of that holiness, innocency, and righteousness wherein they were at first created" Also, "pollution and defilement of nature came upon us." And finally, "an extreme disability of doing any thing that is well-pleasing unto God…"
ch. 8: 2 on Christ the Mediator: The Son took "upon Him man's nature, with all the *essential properties* and common *infirmities* thereof."	Q. 37 on Christ becoming man: "by taking to himself a true *body*, and a *reasonable soul*…"	Q. 22 on Christ becoming man: "by taking himself a true *body*, and a *reasonable soul*…"	ch. 9.2 on God's means of redemption: "By sending his own Son Jesus Christ in the likeness of sinful flesh, condemning sin in the flesh. – Rom. viii. 3" ch. 10.6 on why the Redeemer needed to be human: "That the nature which had offended might suffer, make satisfaction, and so he might be every way a fit and sufficient Saviour for men."
ch. 8: 4 on Christ the Mediator: Jesus "endured most grievous *torments immediately in His soul*, and most *painful sufferings in His body*." The biblical references here include feelings of "sorrow," agony" and experiencing being "forsaken."	Q. 39 on why Mediator had to be man (i.e., human): "that he might *advance our nature*, perform obedience to the law, suffer and make intercession for us in our nature, *have a fellow-feeling of our infirmities*…"	Q. 27 on Christ's humiliation: "consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God…"	ch. 10.5 on proving that Jesus was a 'perfect man': his proofs include noting how the scriptures assign to Jesus "those things which are required to a perfect man; as first, a *body*… secondly, a *soul*…and therein [within the soul], first, a *will*…, secondly, *affections*… thirdly, *endowments*…." He also includes "*general infirmities of nature*." (cf. also WLC Q. 28).

[1] This Appendix serves to illustrate points made in chapters two and three. Here we have selectively gathered the most relevant statements concerning human nature in general, and Christ's humanity in particular. The closest parallels from Owen have been used for the sake of comparison. Emphasis mine throughout.

[2] "Man," as used here and throughout, reflects the original language of the seventeenth century's tendency to include both genders in the category of "man."

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